PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto

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Piano No Mori Ch 84

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The Perfect World of KAI

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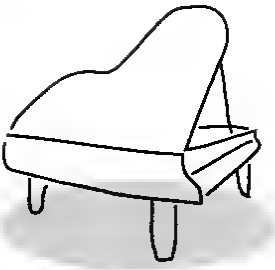
The Perfect World of KAI

11



The Perfect World of KAI

11

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Chapter 84 One Who Can Overcome The Wall

Chopin International Contest

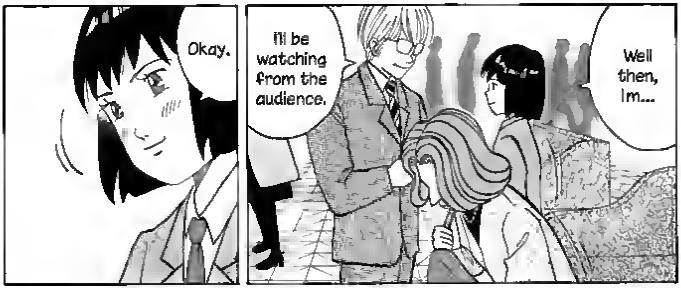
Audition for Recommendation

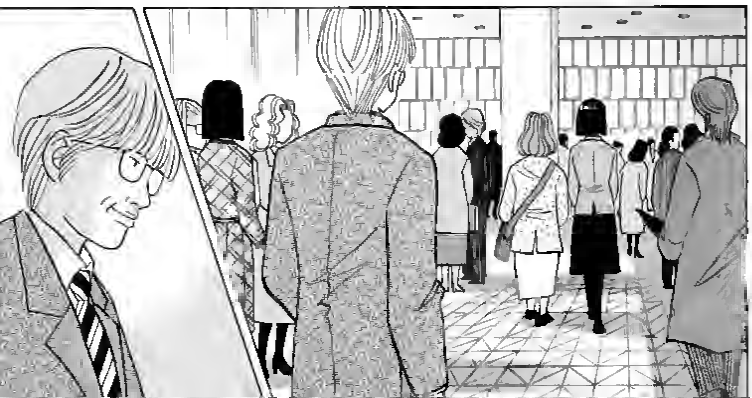
-2nd Round Preliminaries-

Isn't she the youngest participant in this competition?
That's true.
Oh, that girl...
Number 18, Maruyama Takako.
Did you hear her 1st round performance?
Yeah, she got the longest standing ovation.
But is it always better to get more applause?
Her performance does have a lot of feeling, but that's not everybody's cup of tea.
So I didn't think it was...

Your 1st round performance just received a lot of attention.
Don't listen to them.
T...Takako-ojousama!
I'm...
Nervous.
Don't worry, and be confident.
You practiced enough to fight against this pressure, didn't you?
There's no need to be nervous.
Haha-ha...
OKAY.

All participants in the 2nd round, please proceed to the waiting room now. All participants
ポーン ポーン
ピン
...


Okay.
I'll be watching from the audience.
Well then, Im...



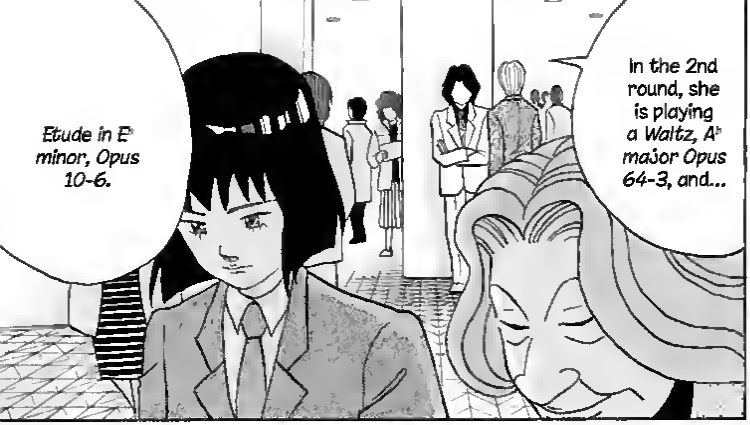
Ah...
SAGA-
SENSEI

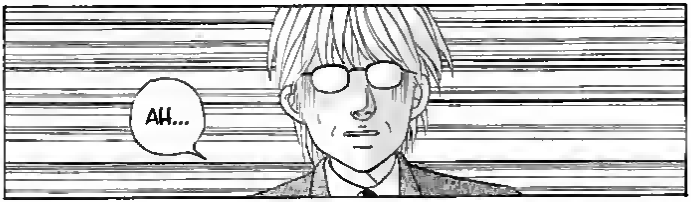
QCER NOTE: HEY, LOOK AT THAT! THEY EVEN MENTION OUR GROUP "EASY GOING" IN THE SCRIPT! LOL

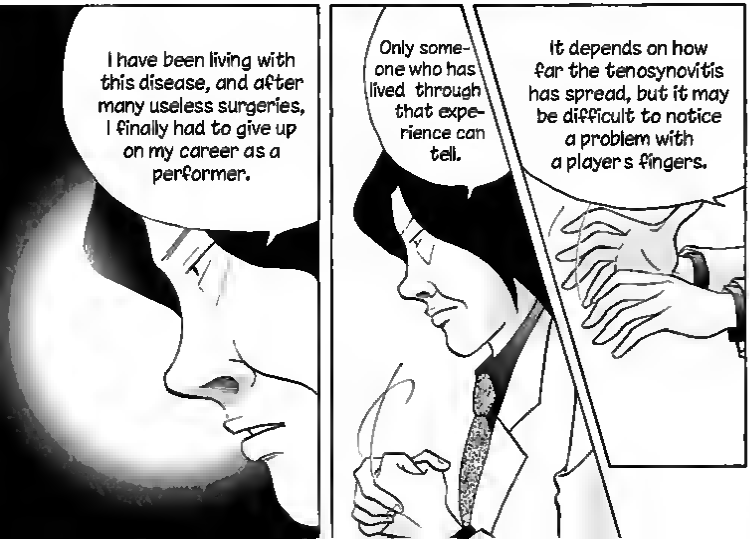
Hmm? Ah...
It's going pretty well.
How's her playing these days?
Your student Maruyama Takako...
Then maybe I was worried over nothing.
Is that so...
...to make her resign from this competition.
I was going to tell you...
?

W...
Haven't you noticed, yet? Her left hand...
What?
It's probably Tenosynovitis.
Her left hand isn't working properly.
What are you saying?
If she keeps on playing in this competition, it might become permanent.
Probably in her middle or ring finger...

T...
There's no way...
Really ?
I THINK I'M RIGHT.


Etude in E♭ minor, Opus 10-6.
In the 2nd round, she is playing a Waltz, A♭ major Opus 64-3, and...


AH...


I have been living with this disease, and after many useless surgeries, I finally had to give up on my career as a performer.
Only someone who has lived through that experience can tell.
It depends on how far the tenosynovitis has spread, but it may be difficult to notice a problem with a player's fingers.

That's non-sense...!
START OVER!
Shiba, give it up this time!
T...

パ
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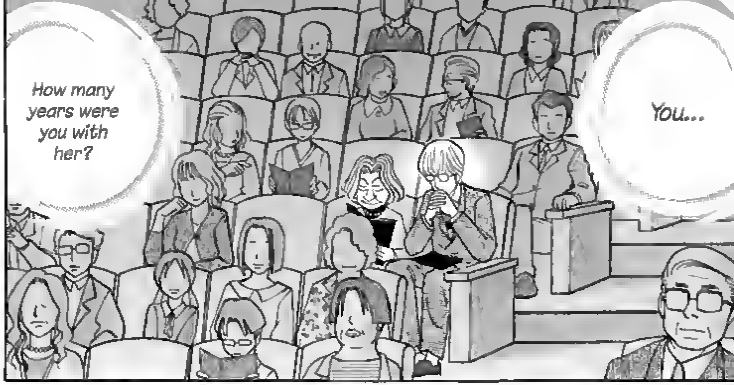
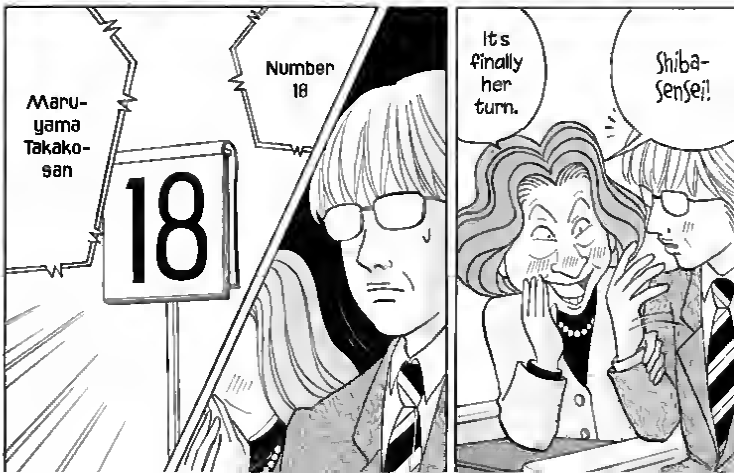
She has tenosynovitis?!

And I didn't even notice?
In such an advanced stage.

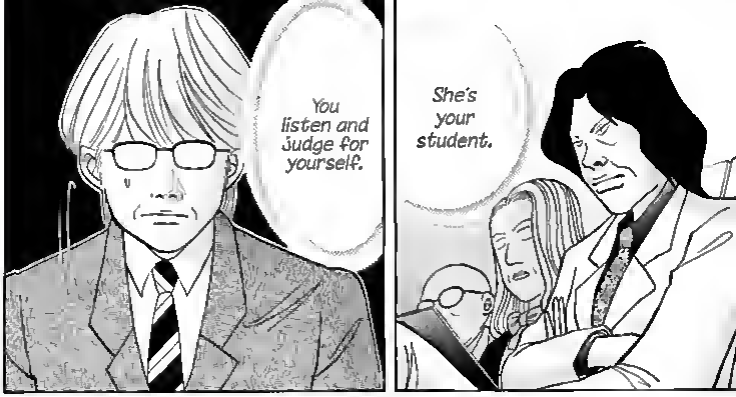
Shiba...
...
How did Saga-sensei realize after hearing her play only once?


How many years were you with her?
You...

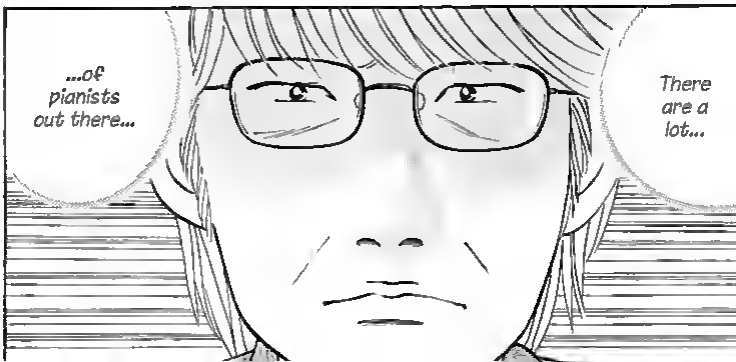
She probably tried to hide it from you in any way possible.
Im not blaming you for not realizing sooner.


Maru-yama Takako-san
Number 18
18
It's finally her turn.
Shiba-Sensei!

パチパチパチパチ
18
パチパチパチパチ
Takako

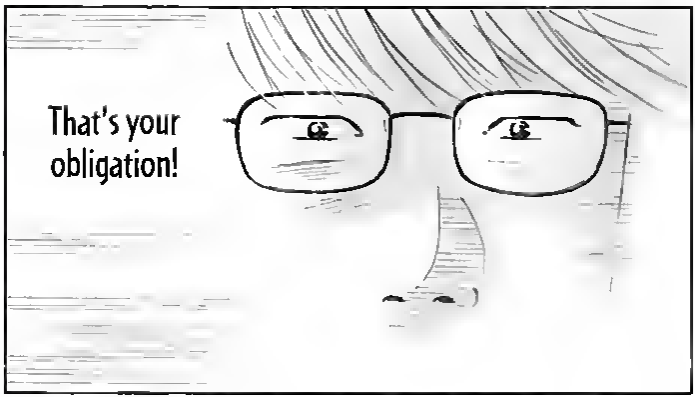

You listen and judge for yourself.
She's your student.

But, I will say this...


...of pianists out there...
There are a lot...

But only a few of them...
Can overcome this invisible wall.
If you don't want to decrease that number by even one...

Make her give up this competition.


That's your obligation!

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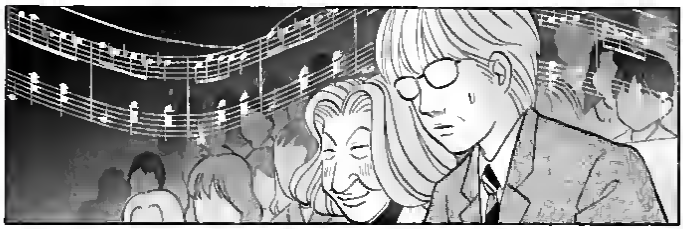
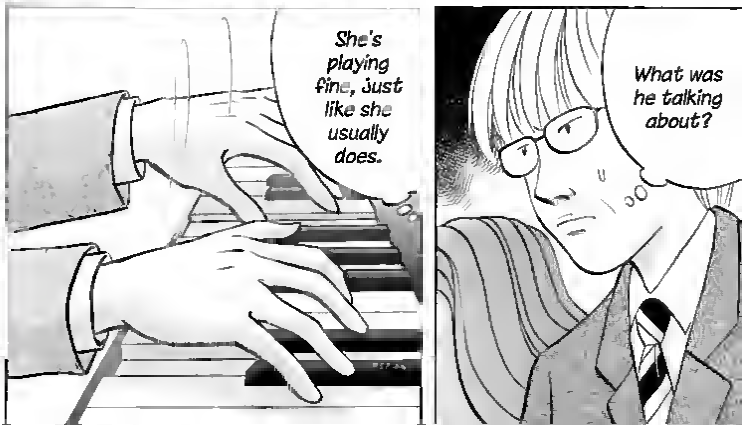
Chapter
85
Please




She's playing fine, just like she usually does.
What was he talking about?

Could it be that Saga-sensei just made a mistake?
. . . .
He must have been mistaken.
That's it.

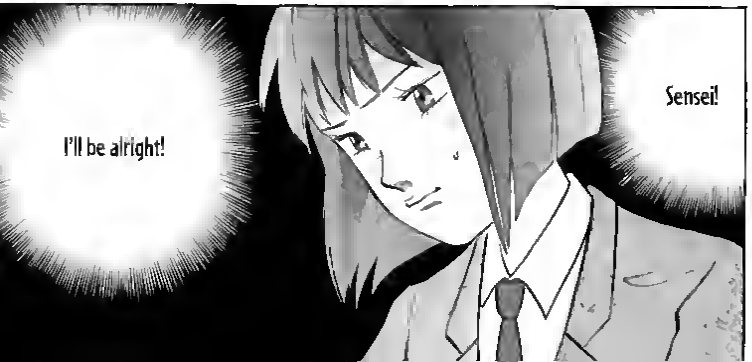
If I have failed to notice something so basic, then I have no right to be her teacher.
I've been watching her play the piano closely.

I want to become a pianist no matter what.
Sensei...

And the determination to make your wish come true!
Don't worry. You have a lot of talent.

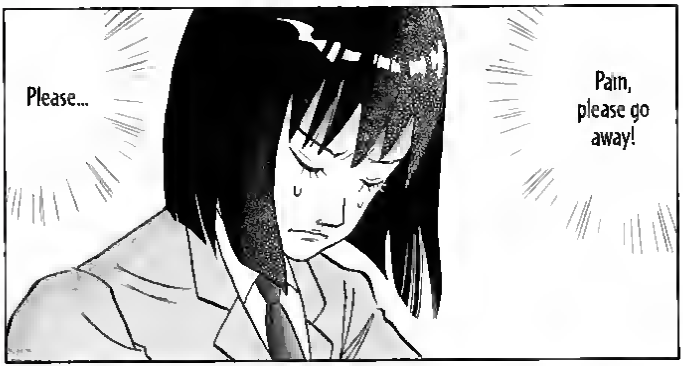
There's nothing more important to me than that

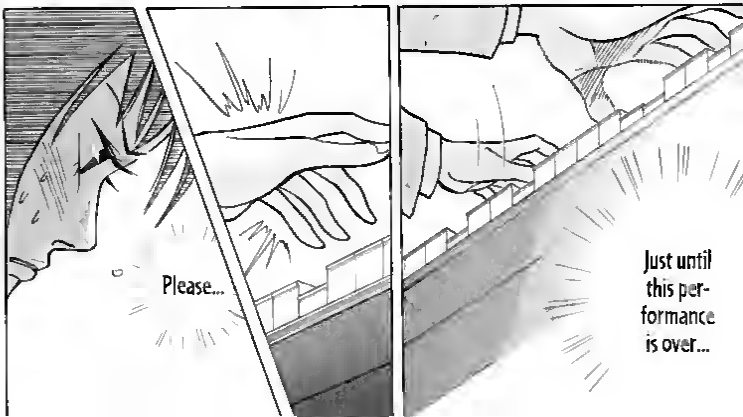
Haha, then we have nothing more to worry about!
Sensei, I'll practice more than anyone else!
Takako...


I'll be alright!
Sensei!

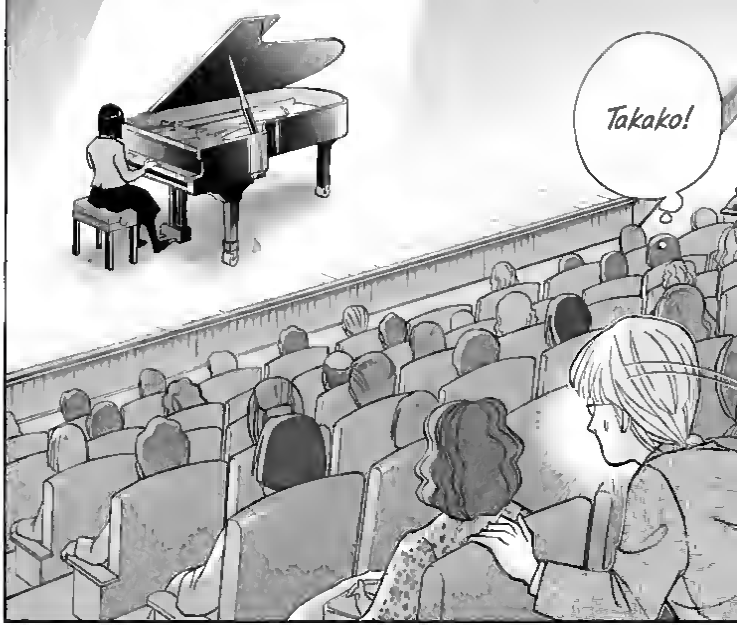
I've got the talent and I've got the determination.
And I practiced more than anyone else.
That's why...
I can't give up here.
But...
When will...

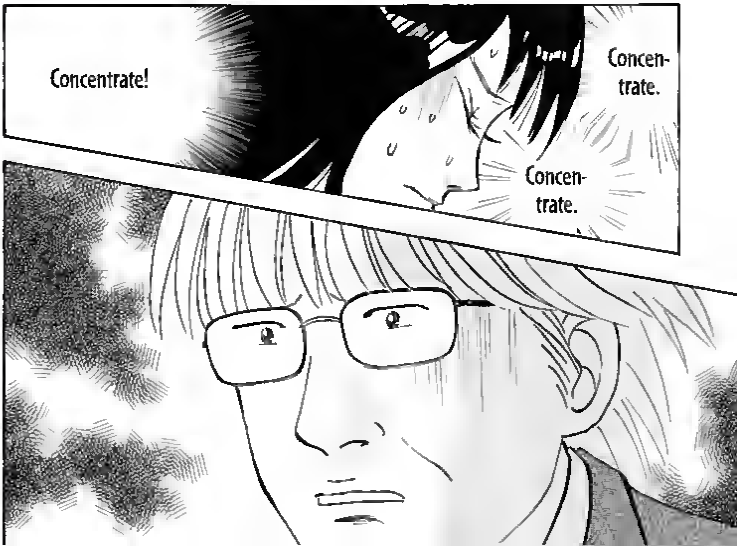
...the pain in my left hand go away?
Even painkillers won't work anymore.
...


Please...
Pain, please go away!


Please...
Just until this performance is over...

Concentrate!
Concentrate, Takako!
The pain isn't there!
Ta...


Takako!

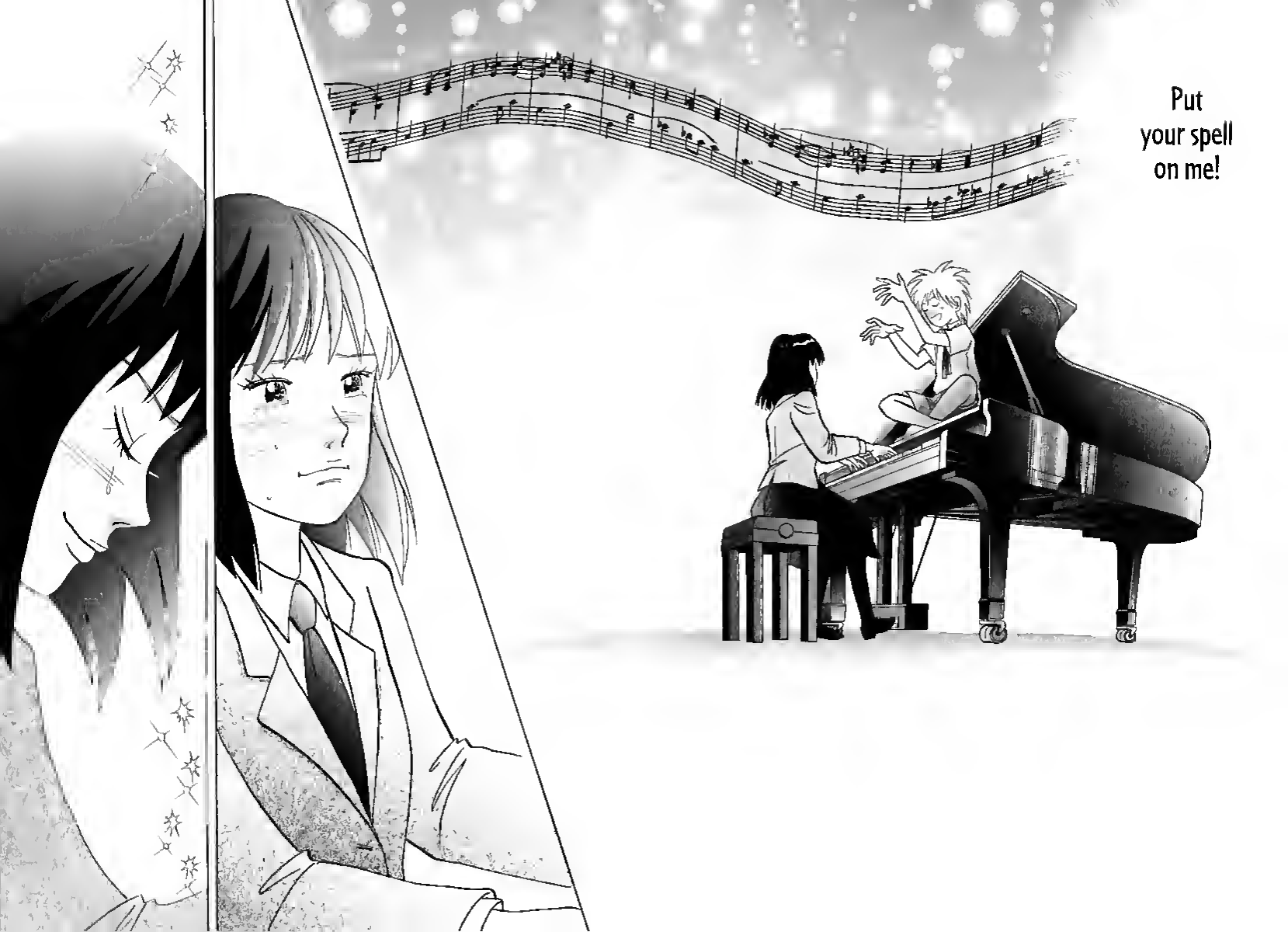

Concentrate!
Concen-
trate.
Concen-
trate.

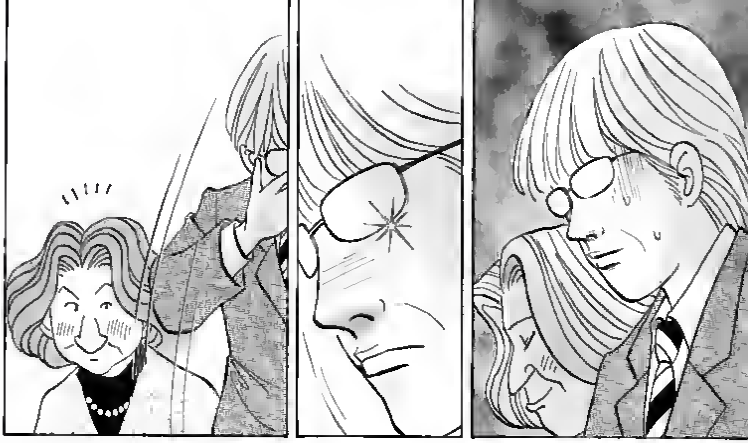
H...

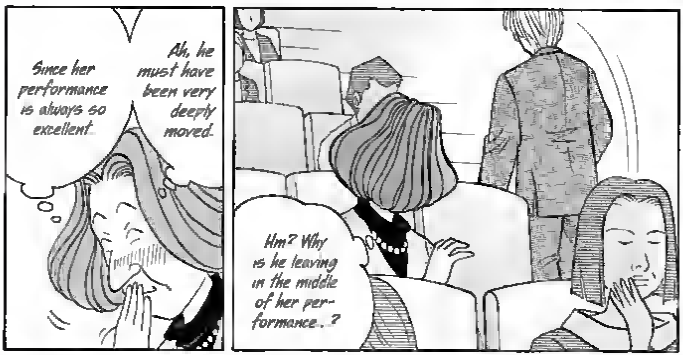
Help me...

Help me, Kai!

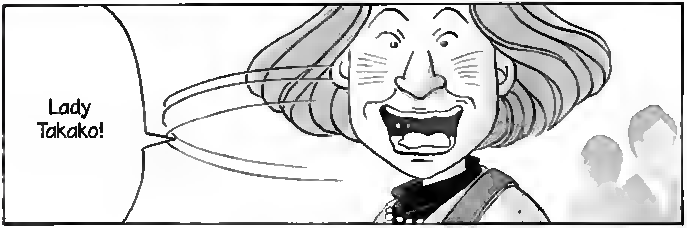
Kai, help me!
Just like that time...
Give me strength!
Just like last time...
put...


Put
your spell
on me!



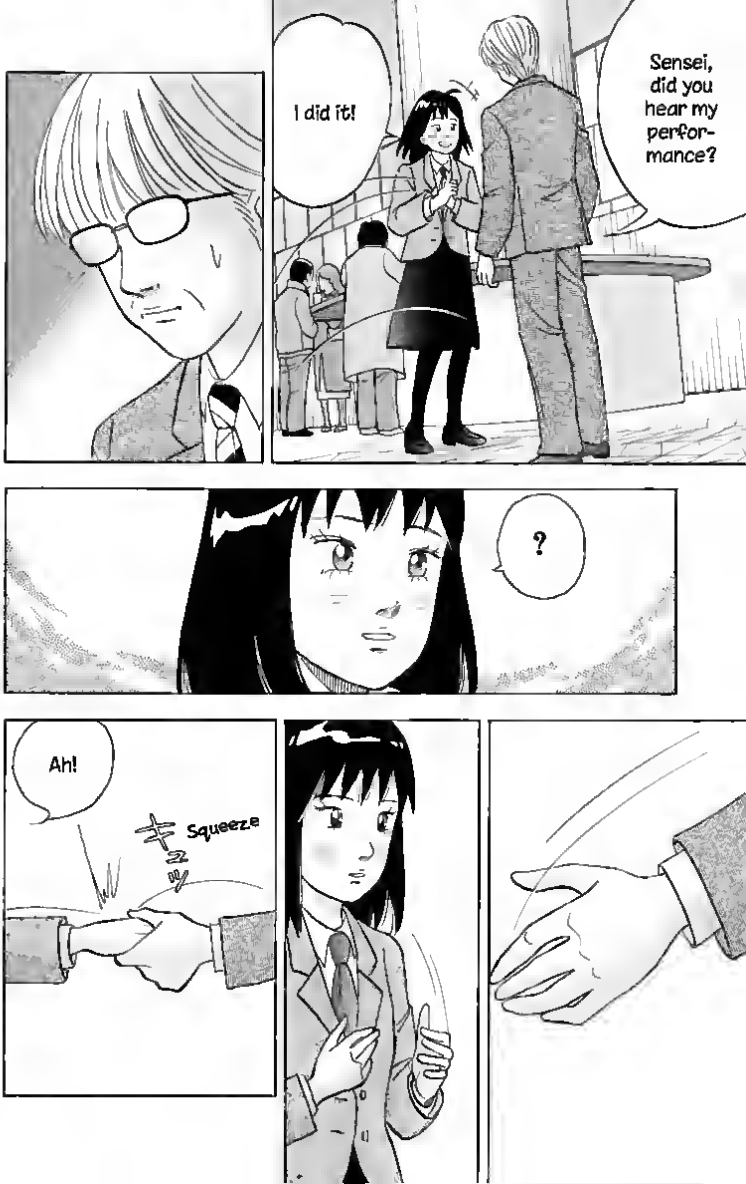

Since her performance is always so excellent.
Ah, he must have been very deeply moved.
Hm? Why is he leaving in the middle of her performance..?

clap clap clap
She is definitely the best performer at this year's competition!
I agree.


Lady Takako!

How was it?
My performance?
It was really truly great!
I've never heard a better performance in my life.
Really?

Ah...
Ah, was that supposed to be a secret?
I'm not lying! Shiba-sensei even shed some tears of joy!
Sensei!


I did it!
Sensei, did you hear my perfor-mance?
?
Ah!
Squeeze

Since when has it been like this?
Ow...
Eh?
Ah...

to be continued...

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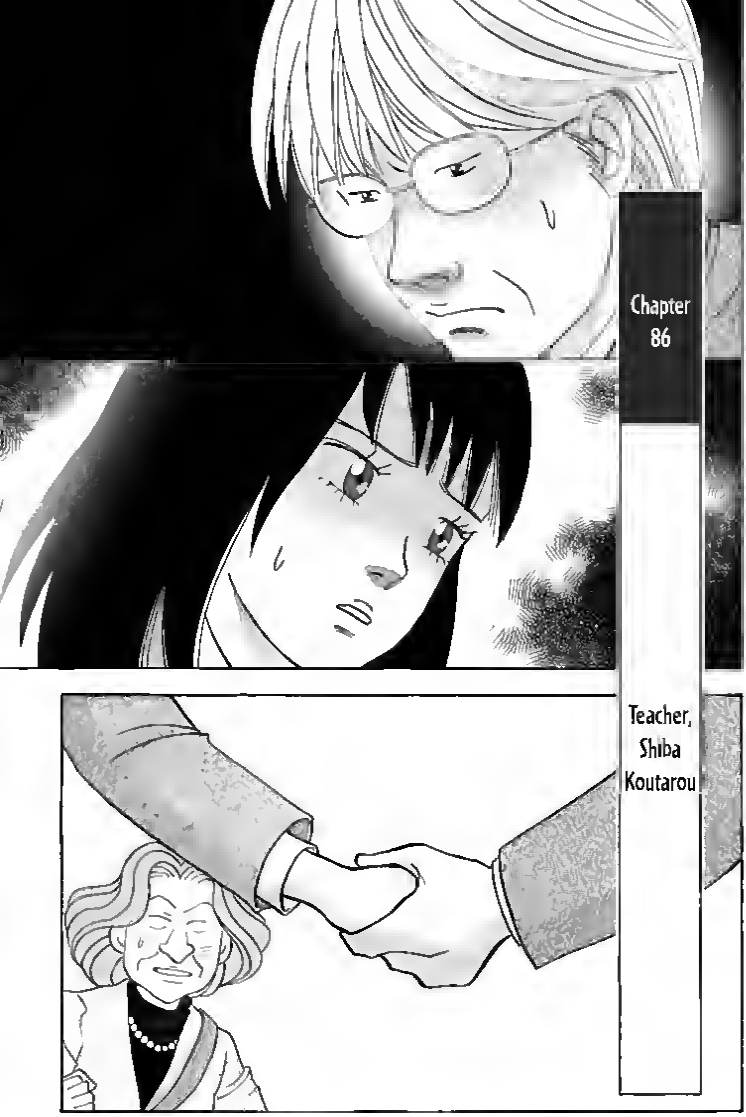
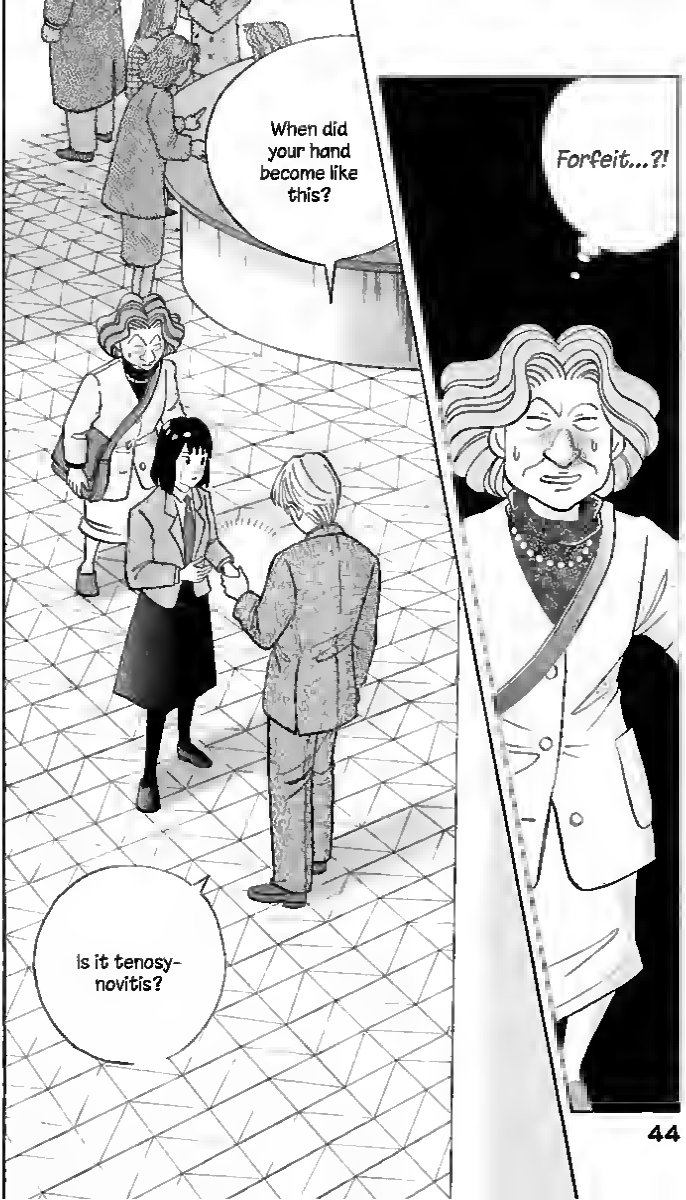
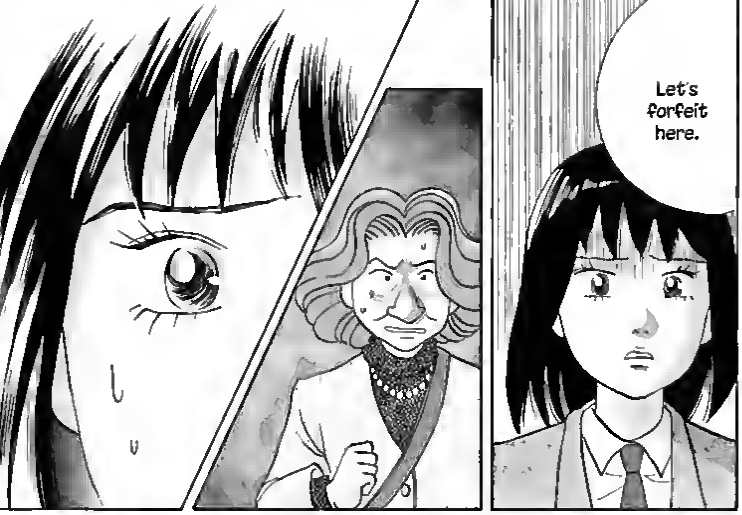
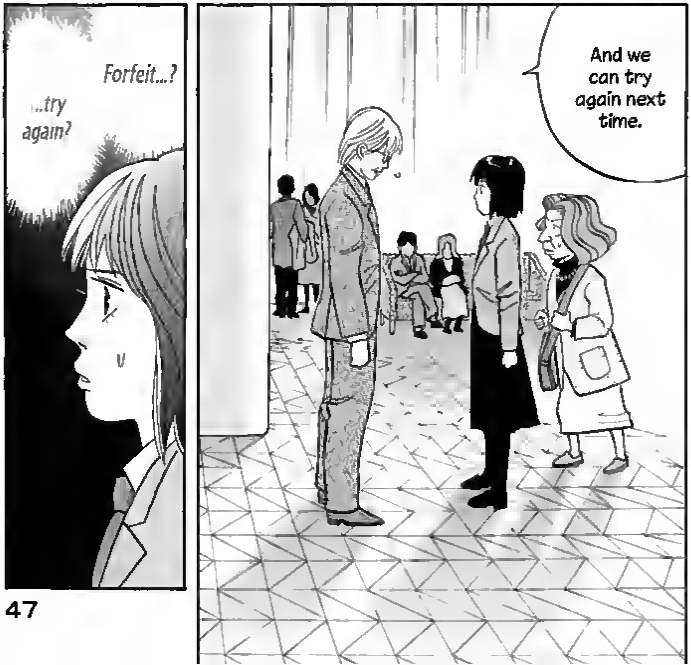

Chapter
86
Teacher,
Shiba
Koutarou

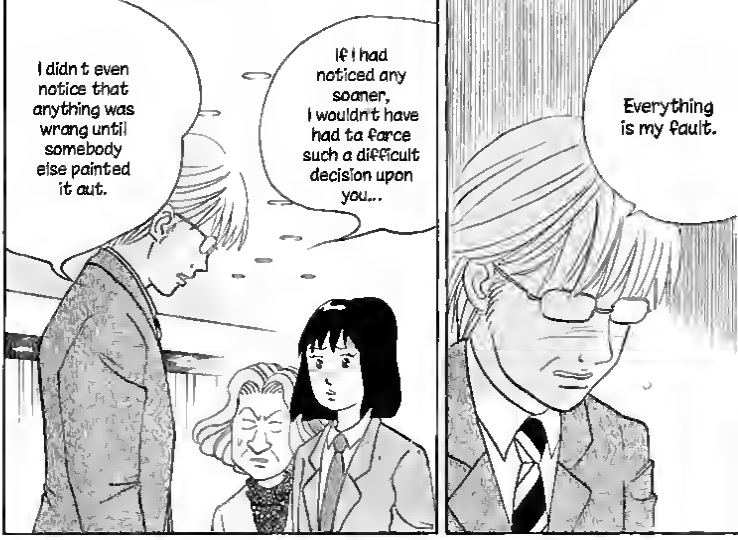

When did your hand become like this?
Forfeit...?!
Is it tenosynovitis?

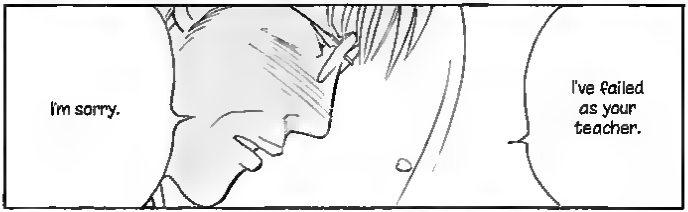
She has tenosynovitis?!
That long ago...
Why didn't she say anything to me!!
It was before you started teaching me...
It was...
I was too scared to tell you.
I went to see a doctor, but all he said was to stop playing piano for a while, so...

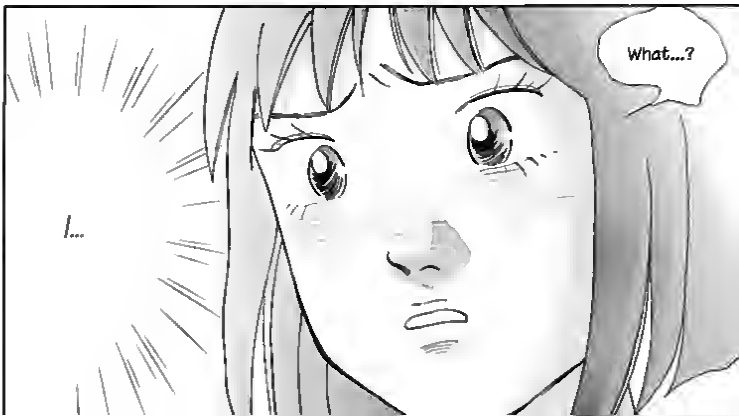
How could I have missed this?
If you had gone to a specialist, we could have found a way to treat it while still continuing your lessons...
There's still a year left before the international competition, so I was going to take the time to treat it then...
Once this competition is over...
Sensei, I'm really sorry. But these kinds of things sometimes get better, right?
How...?!
So this time...
The international competition isn't something that you can prepare for while treating an injury.
That's impossible.


Let's forfeit here.

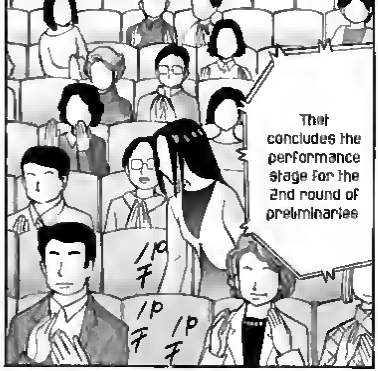

Forfeit...?
...try again?
And we can try again next time.

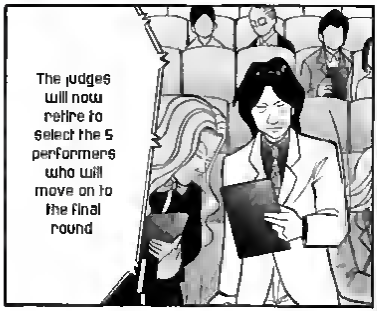

I didn't even notice that anything was wrong until somebody else pointed it out.
If I had noticed any sooner, I wouldn't have had to force such a difficult decision upon you...
Everything is my fault.


I'm sorry.
I've failed as your teacher.


What...?
I...

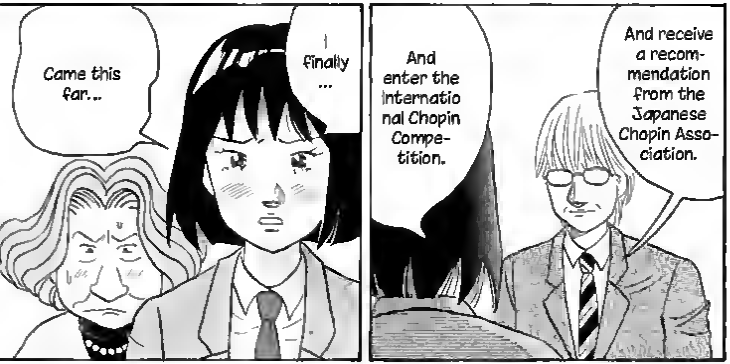
I can't stop here...
I refuse!
Until I meet Kai!
I will not forfeit!

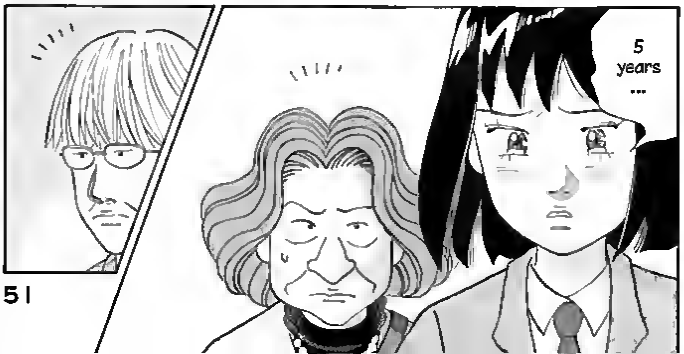

That concludes the performance stage for the 2nd round of preliminaries


The judges will now retire to select the 5 performers who will move on to the final round

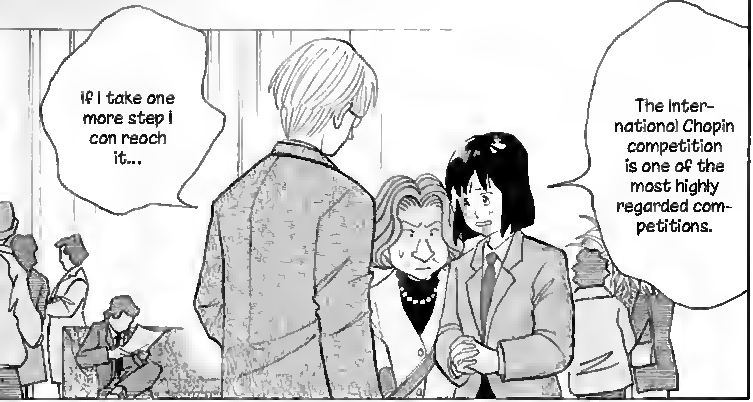
Please wait patiently until the results are posted

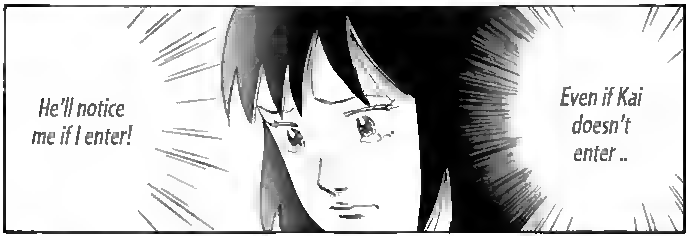
And be in the top 2 at the finals...
Am going to pass the 2nd round...
I...


Came this far...
I finally ...
And enter the internatio nal Chopin Compe- tition.
And receive a recom- mendation from the Japanese Chopin Asso- ciation.


5 years ...

I came this far so that I could stand on stage with Kai again.
5 years since that day...
I finally got so close...


If I take one more step I can reach it...
The International Chopin competition is one of the most highly regarded competitions.


He'll notice me if I enter!
Even if Kai doesn't enter ..

Don't take the piano away from me.
Please, I beg you...
My lady!

If I give up here, everything I worked for goes to waste.

The competition will be held again in 5 years! Do you want to destroy all of y our future chances because of this single attempt?
We're taking a break for the sake of your future!
I'm not taking it away from you.
In your condition now, even if you pass this round, in the finals...
Tokako, let's go to a hospital. We'll try again once your hand is completely healed.
I can do this.
I will.
You're not the one who will be playing.

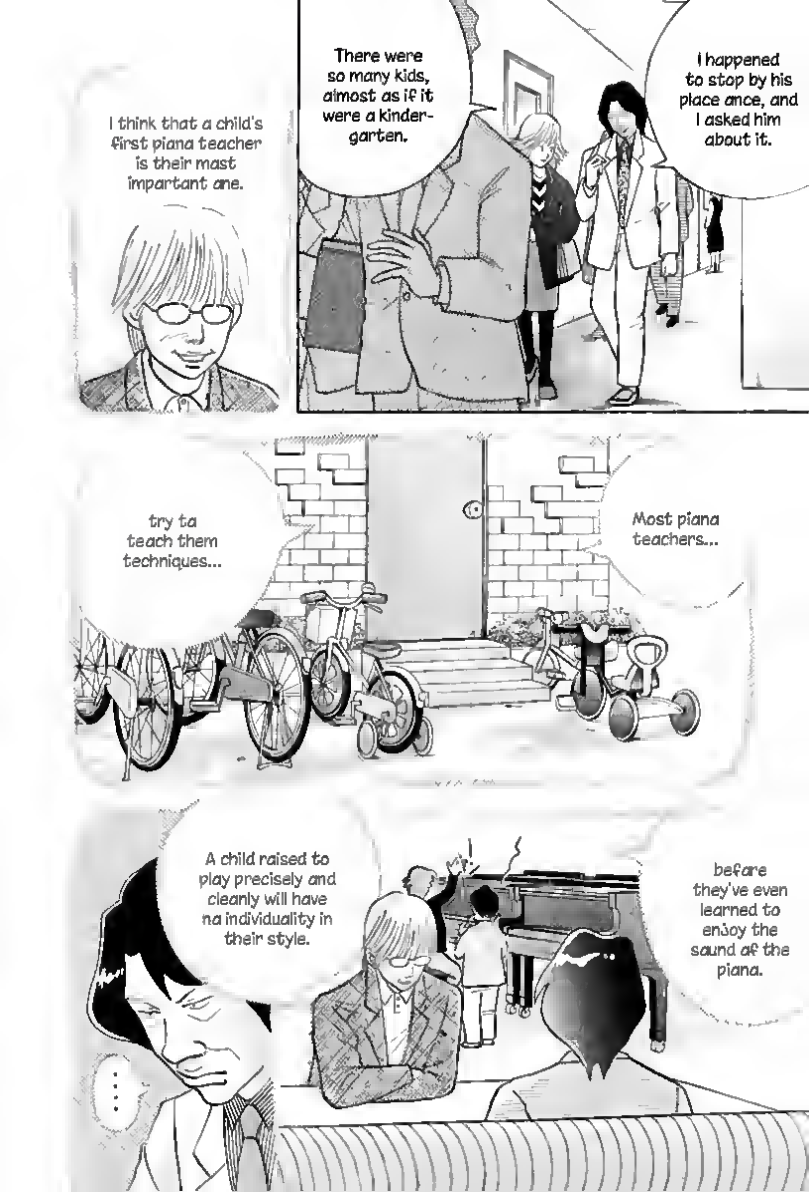
I can do this!

4. Ooshima Akiyoshi
18. Maruyama Takaka
21. Shimada Kentaro
24. Aratama
34. Kanzaki
4. 大嶋 明良
18. 丸山 誉子
21. 島田 賢太郎
24. 新玉
34. 神崎
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
パチ
2nd round Selection in Progress

パチ
パチ
パチ

Very well then, we have decided that these 5 will proceed to the main round.

Ahahaha...
I ask everyone here to continue as judges in the upcoming main round.
Saga-sensei
You said that there weren't any good players this time around, but number 18, Maruyama Takako, is pretty good, isn't she?
One of the 2 recommendations this year will definitely be Maruyama Takako.
The only problem is that we have to pick another person!
I took a look at her files, and I discovered that her teacher was Hayama high school's Shiba-sensei.
I thought Shiba-sensei only taught little children.
Haha...
You knew about that?


I think that a child's first piano teacher is their most important one.
There were so many kids, almost as if it were a kindergarten.
I happened to stop by his place once, and I asked him about it.
Most piano teachers...
try to teach them techniques...
A child raised to play precisely and cleanly will have no individuality in their style.
before they've even learned to enjoy the sound of the piano.
...

I want to meet with talented players who can enjoy their music!
And that is where our individuality comes from.
...is different for each and every one of us...
The way that we enjoy music...
...That's all fine and dandy, but just be the judge at the next competition.
That's why I'm interested to see how well he does.
Waw, I'm jealous.
It's hard to bring out so much talent no matter how hard you teach someone.
So we can say that Maruyama Takako is the first serious student that Shiba has ever taken.

Finalists

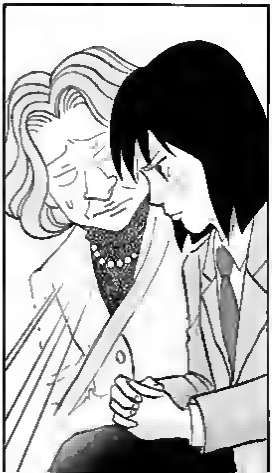
4 Ooshima Akiyoshi

18 Maruyama Takako

21 Shimada Kentaro

24 Aratama Maiko

34 Kanzaki Dai



Where is Shiba?
...
I won't ever give up.
I...

Teacher, Shiba Koutarou END

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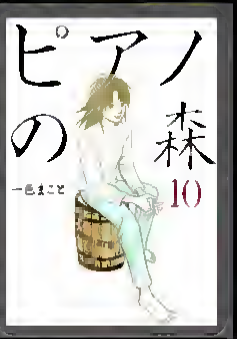
by Isshiki Makoto



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Piano No Mori Ch 87

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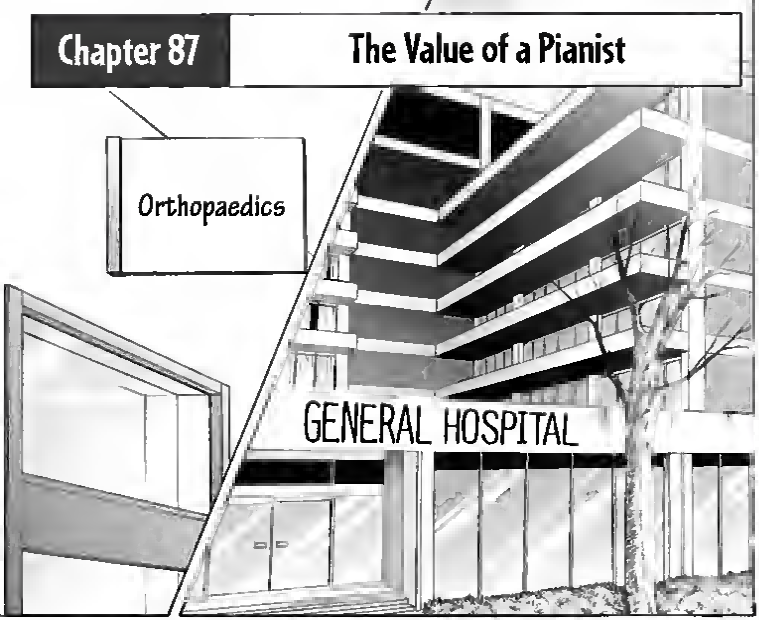
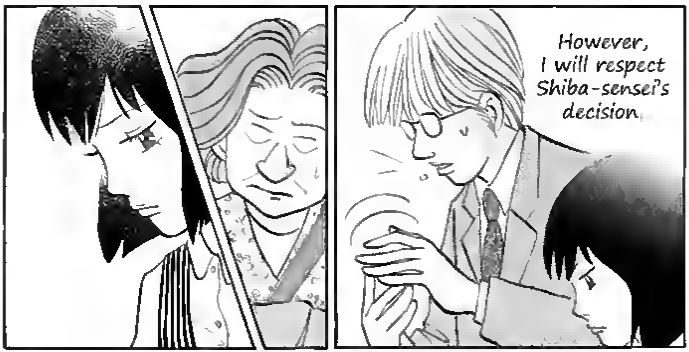
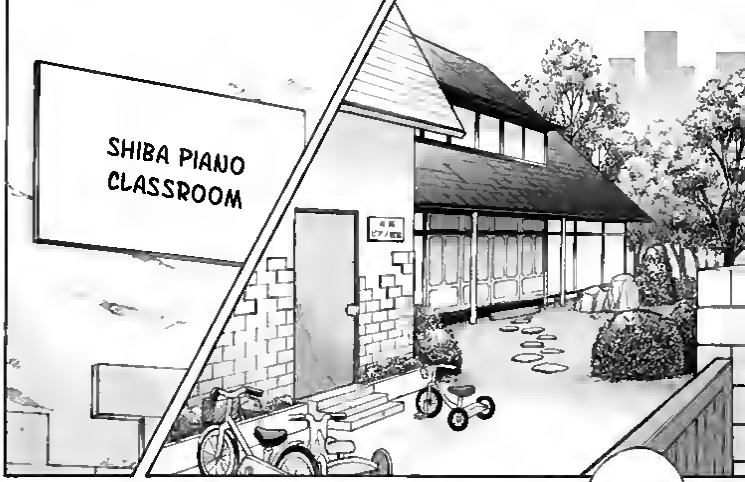
Chapter 87 The Value of a Pianist

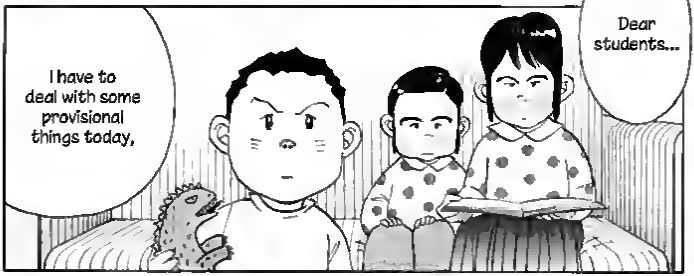


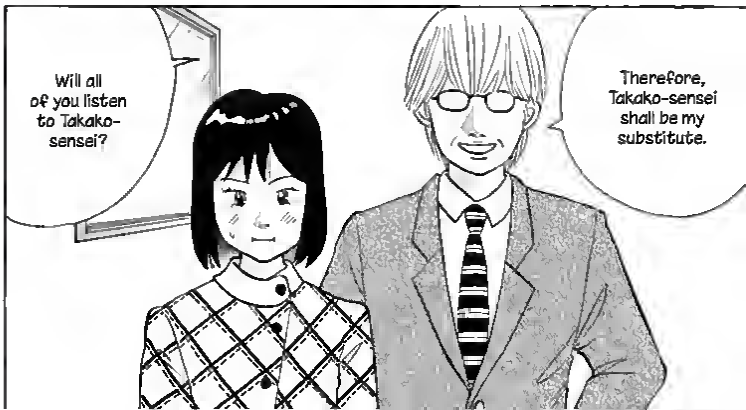
I don't want to say anything


However, I will respect Shiba-sensei's decision

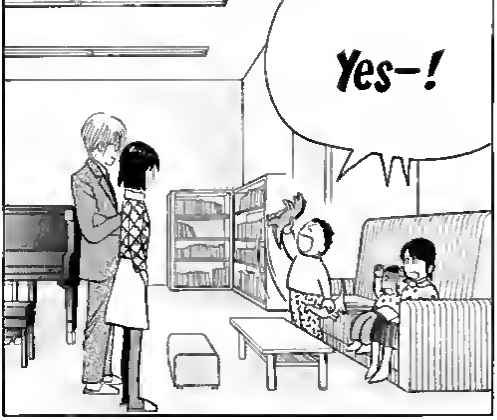
お薬窓口
Besides withdrawing from the selection...

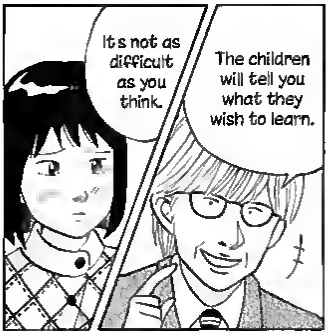

SHIBA PIANO
CLASSROOM

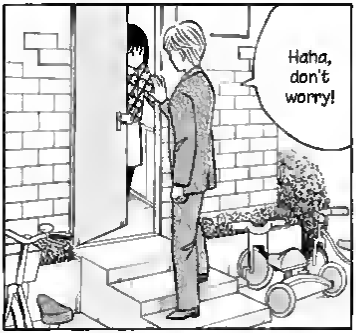

Dear students...
I have to deal with some provisional things today,

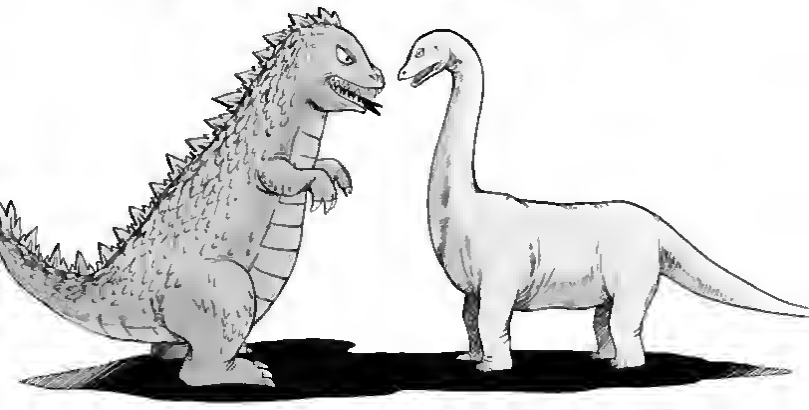

Will all of you listen to Takako-sensei?
Therefore, Takako-sensei shall be my substitute.

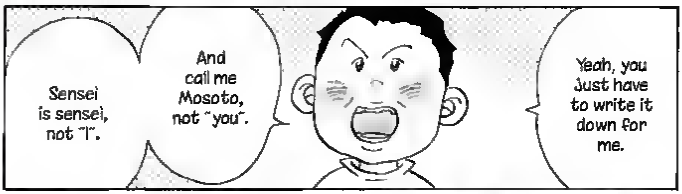
I don't really know how to teach.
Sen... Sensei,

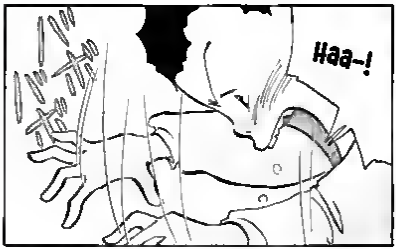

Yes-!


It's not as difficult as you think.
The children will tell you what they wish to learn.


Haha, don't worry!

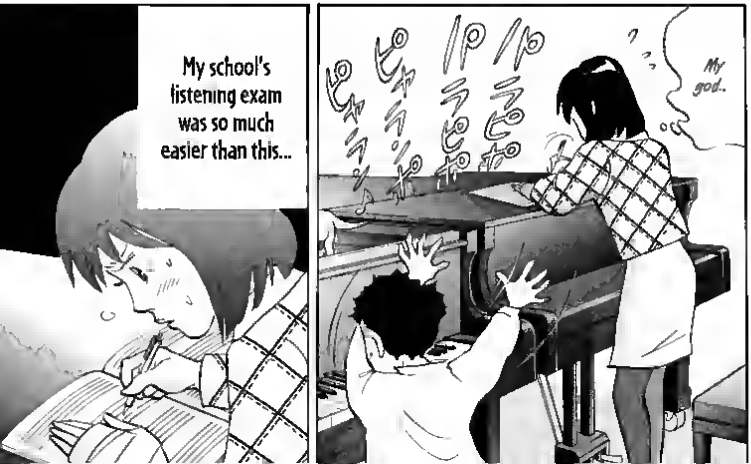






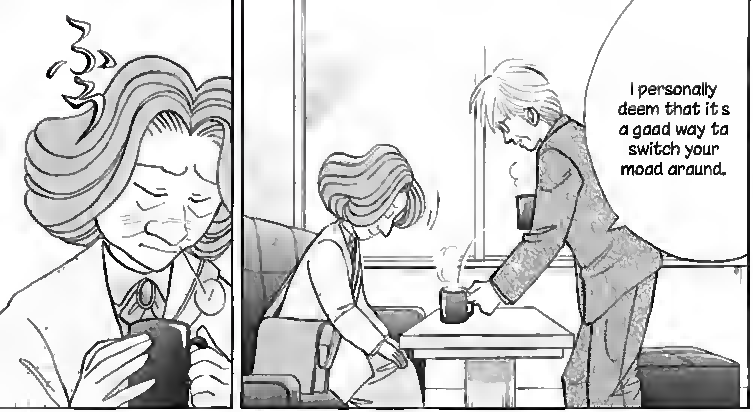
ポポポポ
ポポポポ
ポポポポ

I can't play the exact same thing for a second time!
S-Sorry, could you play it again?
Well? Did you write that down?

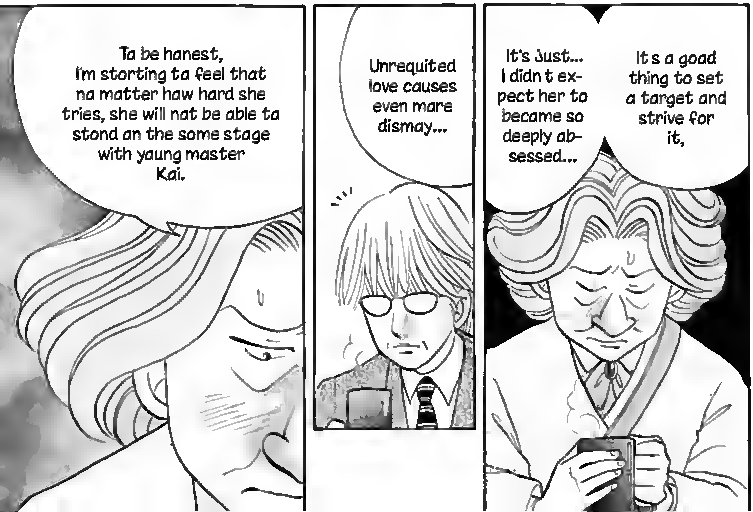

My school's listening exam was so much easier than this...
My god..

Affiliate of the Hayama University of Music

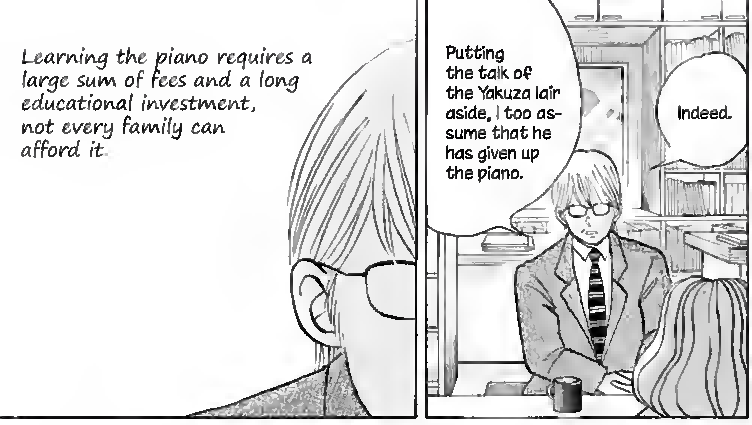
Perhaps.
Ha ha...
Hayama High School Piano Division
I assume Lady Takaka must be having a hard time dealing with the children right now?
Staff Lounge

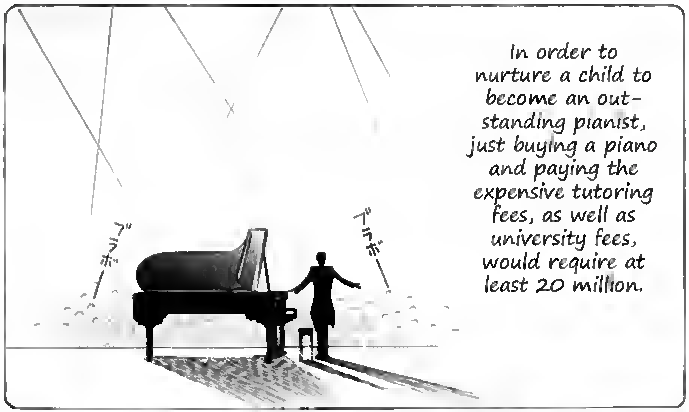

I personally deem that it's a good way to switch your mood around.

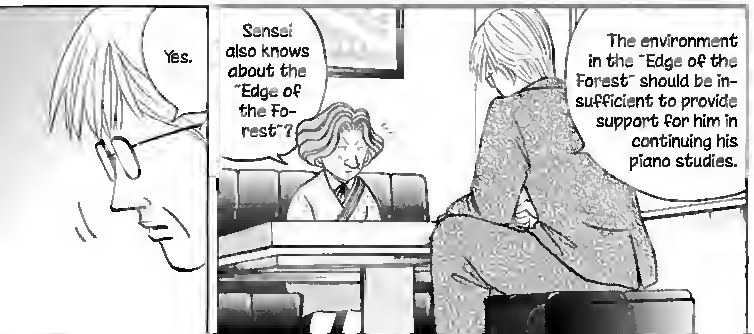
In order to see him again, Lady Takako mustered all of her strength to take part in every single competition.
Lady Takako... has fallen in love with young master Ichinose Kai's performance.


To be honest, I'm starting to feel that no matter how hard she tries, she will not be able to stand on the same stage with young master Kai.
Unrequited love causes even more dismay...
It's just... I didn't expect her to become so deeply obsessed...
It's a good thing to set a target and strive for it,

It is quite possible... that young master Kai has given up the piano.
Are you saying that he has money problems?
yes.
Perhaps sensei will think that I'm being rude...
However, young master Kai grew up in a place known as the "Edge of the Forest".
That place has become a Yakuza lair.


Learning the piano requires a large sum of fees and a long educational investment, not every family can afford it.
Putting the talk of the Yakuza lair aside, I too assume that he has given up the piano.
Indeed.


In order to nurture a child to become an outstanding pianist, just buying a piano and paying the expensive tutoring fees, as well as university fees, would require at least 20 million.


Yes.
Sensei also knows about the "Edge of the Forest"?
The environment in the "Edge of the Forest" should be insufficient to provide support for him in continuing his piano studies.

After the competition, I located the "Edge of the Forest" according to the sources from Moriwaki Elementary School, but in the end, I gave up the search for Ichinose Kai
This world is unfair.
...
Even though he has amazing talent, he was not born to a wealthy family, thus

His talent is destined to be buried
The only possible way for him to escape his fate
Piano Division Staff Lounge

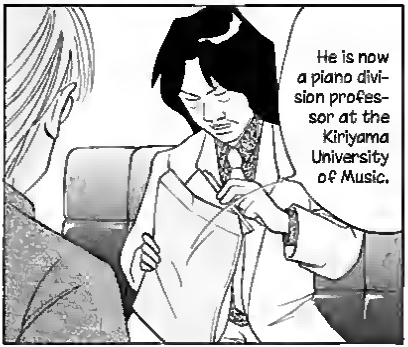
Would be for someone to take Ichinose Kai away from the "Edge of the Forest".
piano division staff lounge
Shiba-chan, you have quite a few guests today.
Saga-sensei...
Thank you for your previous advice...
I will, somehow, convince her to withdraw from the competition.

This is...?
I hope this helps.
I see...
The pain on her left hand had reached to the extent that can no longer be ignored.
Even though she's reluctant to do so,
A Letter of recommendation for an orthopaedic specialist hospital.
I Just brought the recommendation letter along, that's all.
I'm here to discuss something else,
Haha, of course not.
I'm very grateful... you came specifically to give me this?

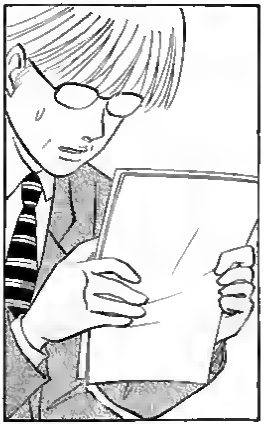
Something else...?
It's about him.
EH?
I believe you will be very interested.
Yes.
HIM?
Ajino Sousuke,
He has returned to the world of piano.

WHAT...?

I unintentionally found him when I was searching for someone.

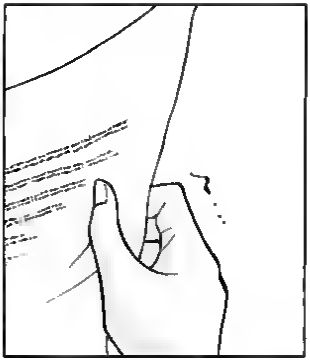

He is now a piano division professor at the Kiriyama University of Music.

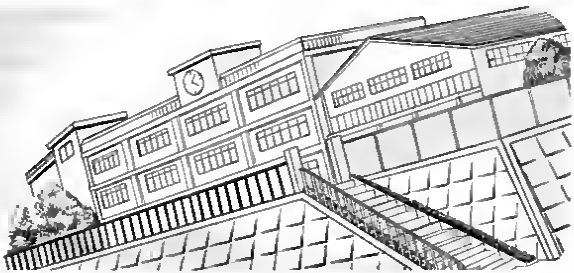
The school forbids any leakage of information, you have to keep this a secret.
Piano Division Professor
Ajino Sousuke



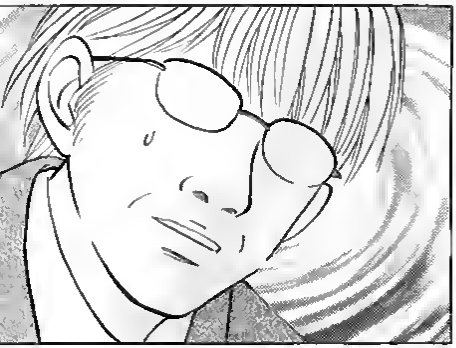
It really is him...
Ajino Sousuke!
プロフィール
He used to be o music teocher ot Moriwoki Elementory School.
Thot's not oil, here's the most important part.
You should be familior with it...
Moriwaki Elementary School...

森島小学校





Moriwaki Elementory Schooi...
Ichinose Kai used to be in that school.
Yes.
Don t ...
Don t tell me...
I, too, find it impos-sible,
However, you should toke a look ot the information I found yes-terday.



JAPAN SOLISTE
Piano Competition

2nd Preliminaries
List of Finalists

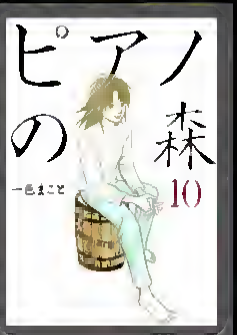
JAPAN SO
Piano Comp
2nd Preliminaries List of Finalists

Ichinose Kai
Ogata Ryokuhei
Nagasaka Yoko
Fujimura Youjin

The Value of a Pianist / END

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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Chapter 88

Good Old Days

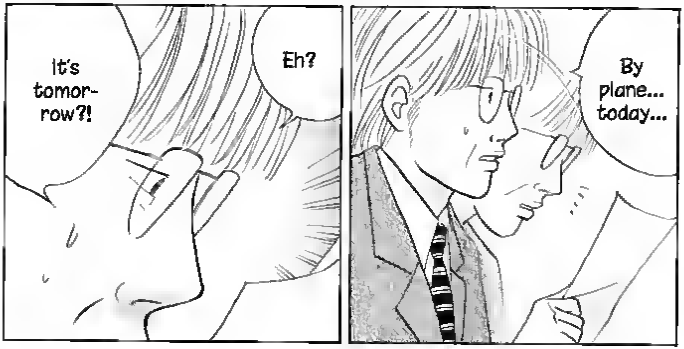
2nd Preliminaries
List of Finalists

Ichinose Kai

Ichinose Kai...
He didn't quit the piano!!
The one who took him away from the "Edge of the Forest" must be...
Piano Division Professor
Ajino Sousuke

He was...
A truly gifted, internationally renowned pianist!
Ajino Sousuke!

My heart is beating very fast.
Ba-thump
Ba-thump
Ba-thump
Ba-thump
Is it really true?
Is...
What are your plans?
So...

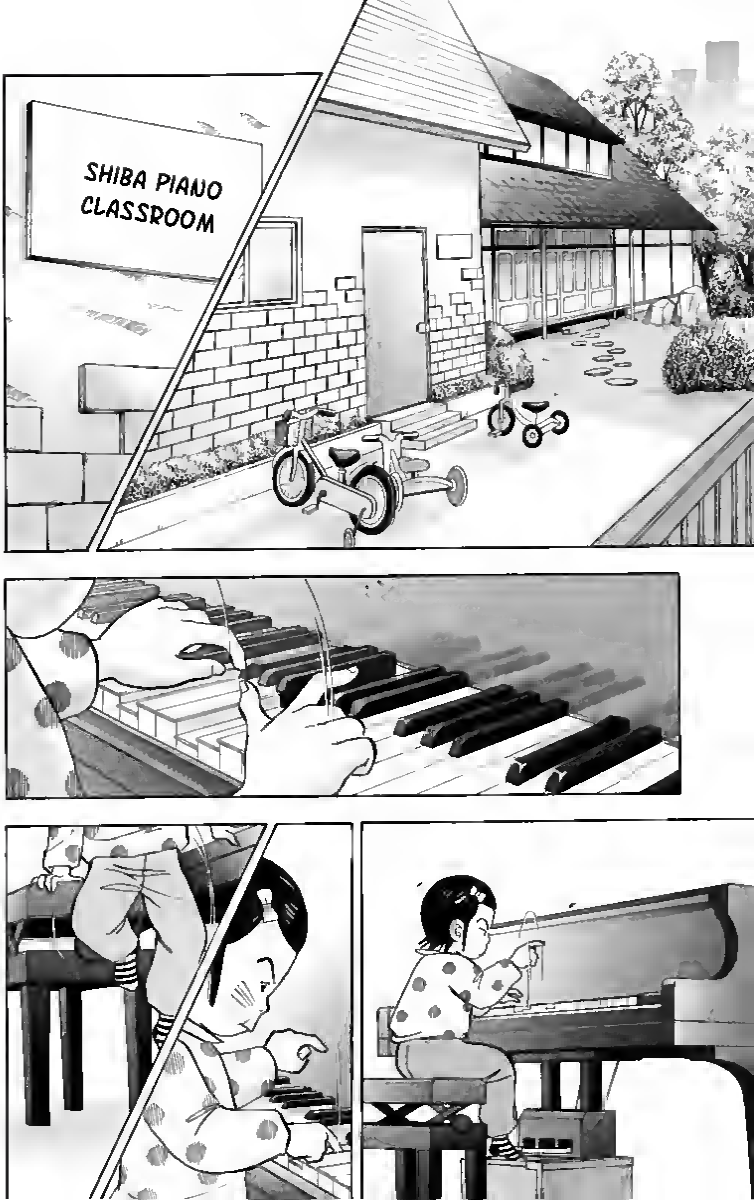


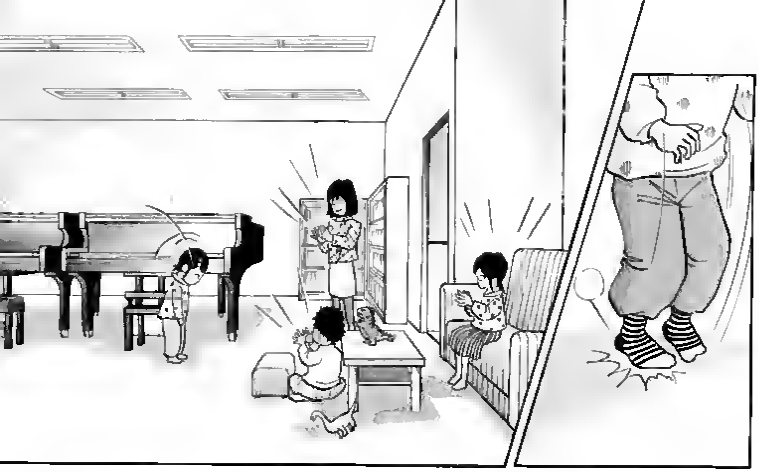
Kyushu?!

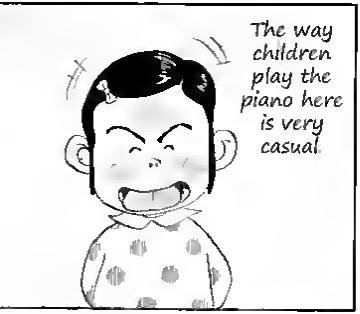
Day: Sunday

Venue: Beppu, Oita Prefecture

Opening Time : 13:00
Performance Time : 13:30
Admission Fee : Normal Seats Adult


SHIBA PIANO
CLASSROOM



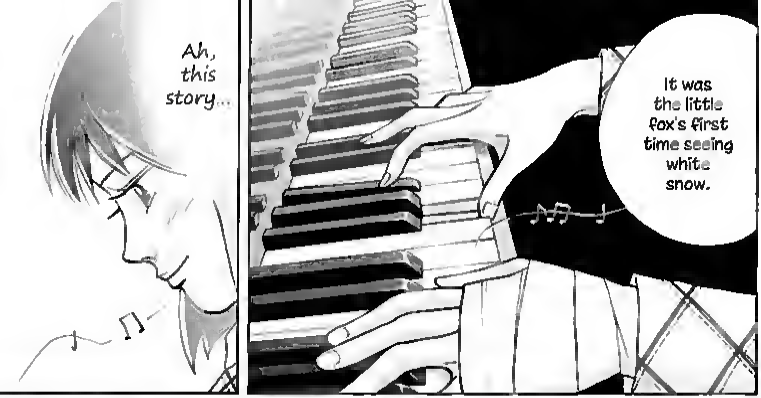

The way children play the piano here is very casual.

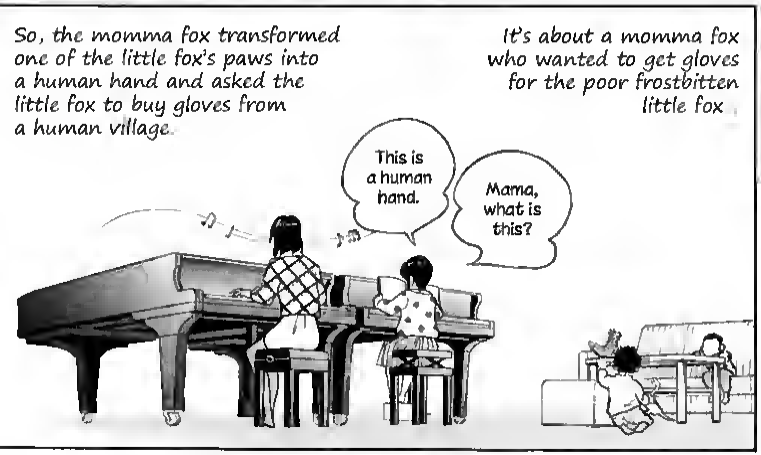
The previous performance piece was "Out for a Walk with a Dog".

OUT TO BUY GLOVES.

Will you read from this storybook, Shizuka?
I will play the piano to match the story.
Since your elder sister is Shizuka, then you must be Nobita?
Why?

(T/N IN THE MANGA DORAEMON NOBITA AND SHIZUKA ARE BEST FRIENDS)


Ah, this story...
It was the little fox's first time seeing white snow.


It's about a momma fox who wanted to get gloves for the poor frostbitten little fox.
So, the momma fox transformed one of the little fox's paws into a human hand and asked the little fox to buy gloves from a human village.
This is a human hand.
Mama, what is this?

I loved this story when I was young.
Before leaving, the momma fox reminded the little fox to use the human hand.

It creates a warm and touching atmosphere,
And makes everyone cast away their worries and enjoy a moment of tranquillity

If I lived in that story land..

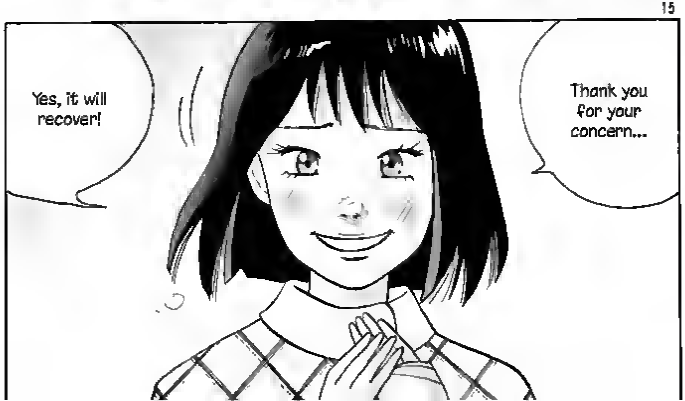
I would beg the momma fox to use her magic on me,
My hand would then be instantly cured.
.....
It's so painful!
I know this better than anybody.
Actu-ally
I couldn't even play such a simple song...

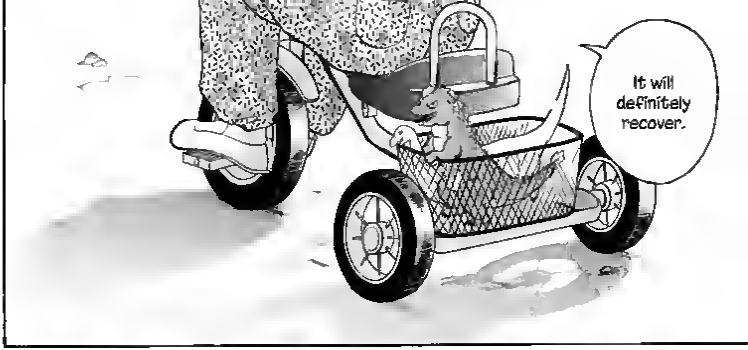
I have reached my limit...
And the shop-keeper was horrified
The little fox put forward his other hand,
Even if I wished to carry on, my hand needs rest,

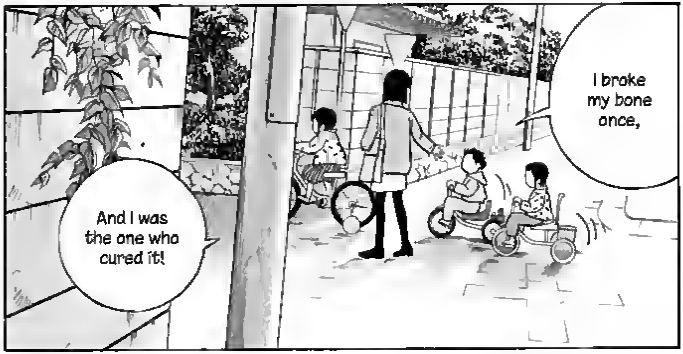
This hand won't listen to me any-more.
Even though I refuse to accept the truth,

I would like to buy a pair of gloves!

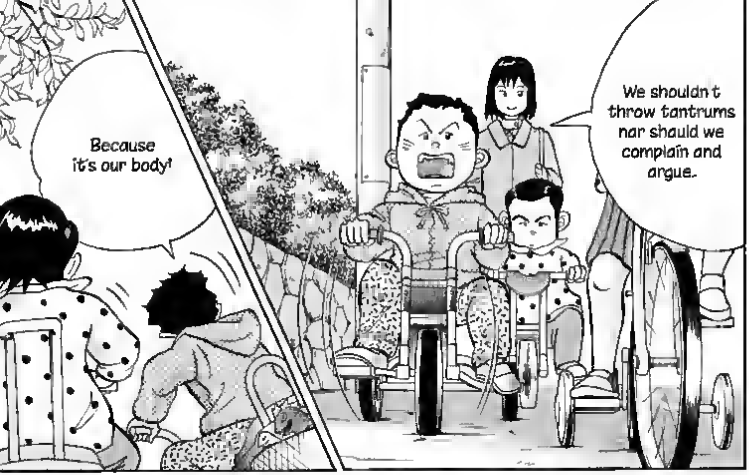
I'm sorry about that.
No, it's fine!
Ah!
Sensei, your hand... Does it hurt?
Ah...
Will it recover?
Eh?


Yes, it will recover!
Thank you for your concern...

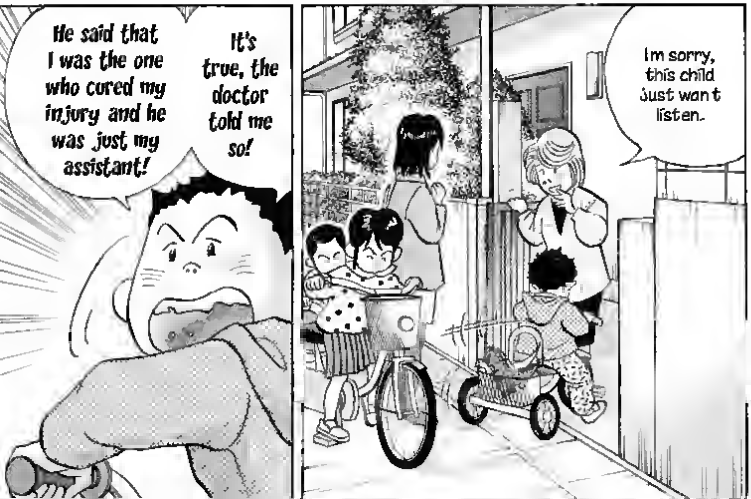

It will definitely recover.


I broke my bone once,
And I was the one who cured it!

Our injuries will only recover if we rely on ourselves.
It was me!
It was the doctor who cured it.

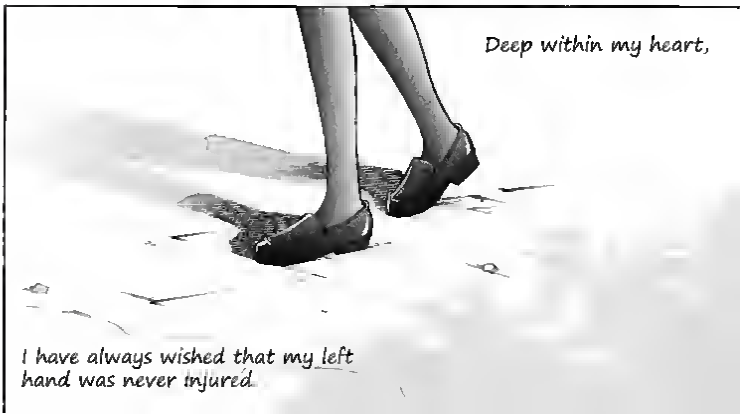

We shouldn't throw tantrums nor should we complain and argue.
Because it's our body!

Nobita, just shut up!
Eh~ It was the doctor who cured it!!

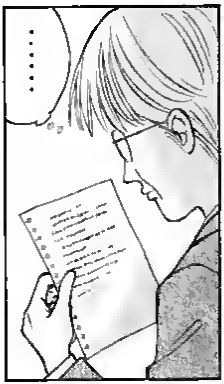

He said that I was the one who cured my injury and he was just my assistant!
It's true, the doctor told me so!
I'm sorry, this child just won't listen.

This child had trouble with the plaster cast; therefore, the doctor had to say this in order to pacify him.

Although


Deep within my heart,
I have always wished that my left hand was never injured.

But I'd never thought about
Curing my left hand.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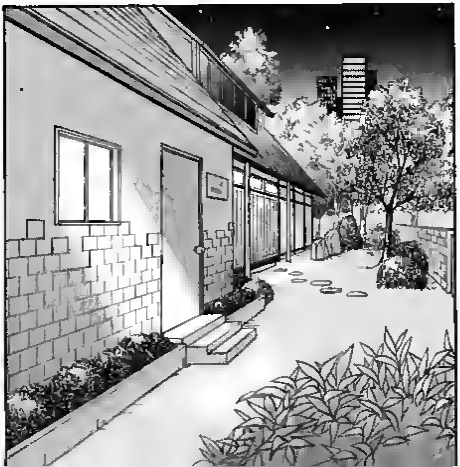
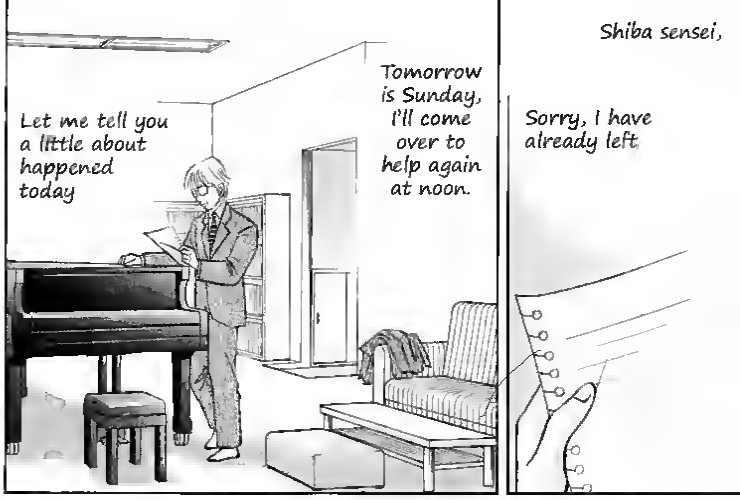
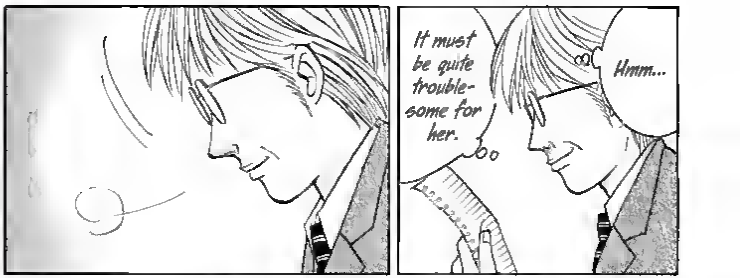
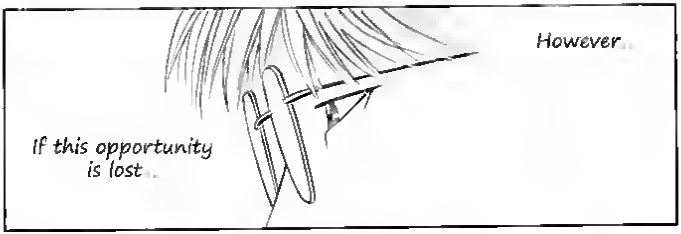


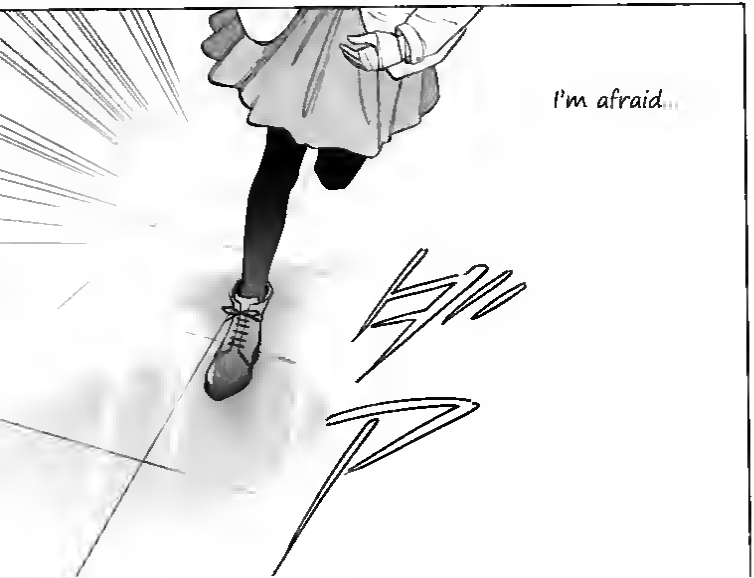

Let me tell you a little about happened today
Tomorrow is Sunday, I'll come over to help again at noon.
Shiba sensei,
Sorry, I have already left


It must be quite trouble-some for her.
Hmm...

Is it alright if I let Takako meet up with Ichinose Kai?
By this time tomor-row.

In order to see him again, Lady Takako mustered all her strength to take part in every single competition.
Lady Takako has fallen in love with young master Ichinose Kai's performance.


However...
If this opportunity is lost...


I'm afraid...
END

Good Old Days / END

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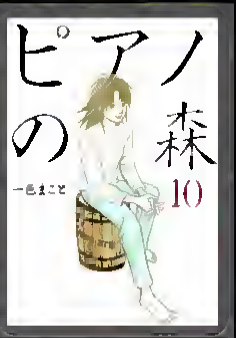
PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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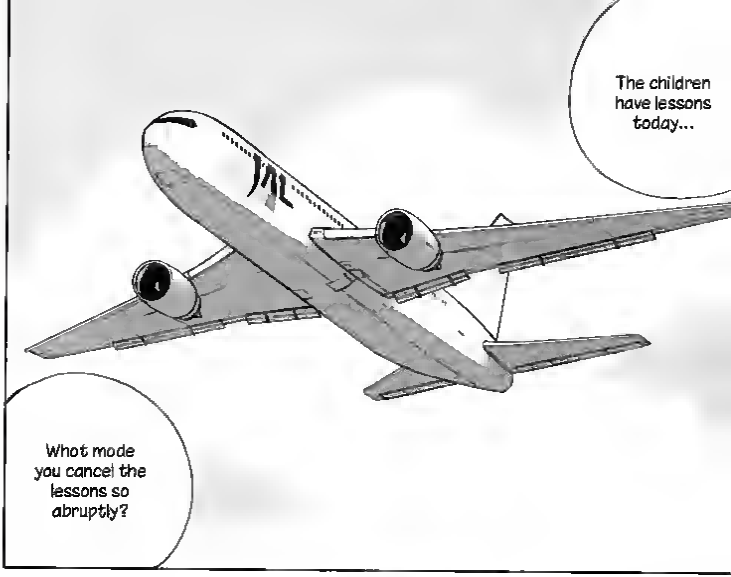
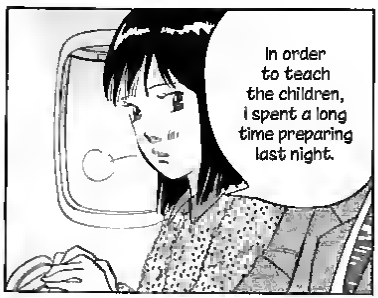
Chapter 89

Welcome to OITA!

JAL
I don't understand why I'm here!
Oita Airport...?
Sensei!
Sen...
Our destination is Oita in Kyushu...?!
Where exactly is sensei leading me?
Takako, hurry up!
Even if the plane lands at Oita airport on time, we require time to reach the competition venue...
Will we make it?


The children have lessons today...
What made you cancel the lessons so abruptly?

I'm sorry for troubling you yesterday.
Haha ...


In order to teach the children, I spent a long time preparing last night.

It's nothing...

Thank you.
It's really difficult to look after the children... I was able to settle things, because you substituted for me.

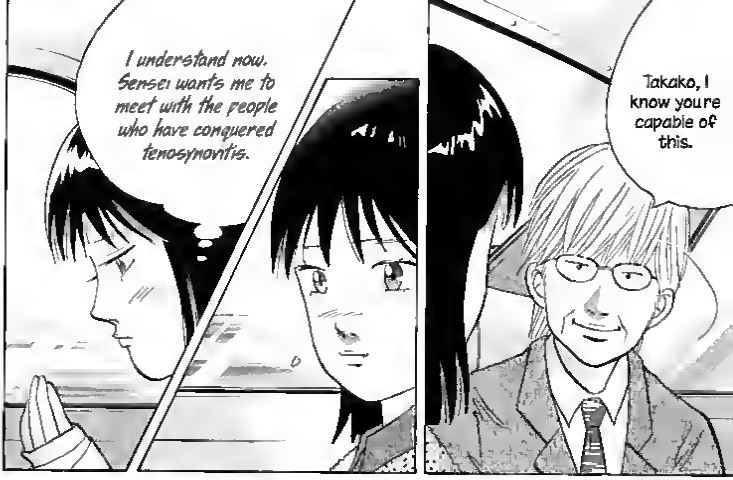
You didn't want me to feel miserable all the time, therefore, you wanted to change my mood?
Sensei, in reality, you didn't really have any unexpected issues yesterday, did you?
. . . .
Shiba-sensei always puts me ahead of himself
It's always like this
This trip to Kyushu,
it's definitely because of me.

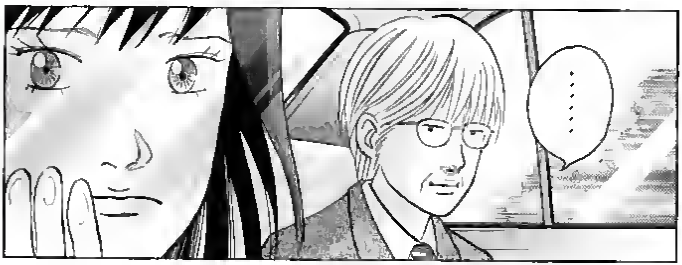
Welcome to Oitali
Takako, hurry up!
Arrivals
International Departures
I would have worn my sneakers if I knew this was going to happen...
Seriously...
Watch out! Don't trip!

Can you drive us to the Beppu Concert Hall?
No problem.
How long will it take?
If we rush there it'll take approximately half an hour.
Please drive us there as fast as you can!
Are you a musician, sir?
Well yes...
There seems to be a music competition going on today.

EH...
Music competition?
I thought we're going to a hospital to examine my hand.
Hospital ...?
I am responsible for finding a suitable hospital...
There must be a doctor who specializes in curing pianist's hands!
AH...
I thought sensei had found a special doctor.
Special doctor
I hope so
No, we're going to a piano competition.

Takako...
Piano competition? Meet a person?
I want you to meet a person.
Only then we'll be able to produce wonderful music.
In order to be a true pianist, we must always be in excellent condition and...
The flower of success bloomed by a true pianist will never wither.
A pianist is nurtured when they're young and they undergo a long period of training in order to achieve success.
This is the basis for becoming a true pianist.
Overcoming illness makes one even stronger,
I was never diagnosed with tenosynovitis; however, there are many pianists out there who successfully conquered tenosynovitis.


I understand now. Sensei wants me to meet with the people who have conquered tenosynovitis.
Takako, I know you're capable of this.

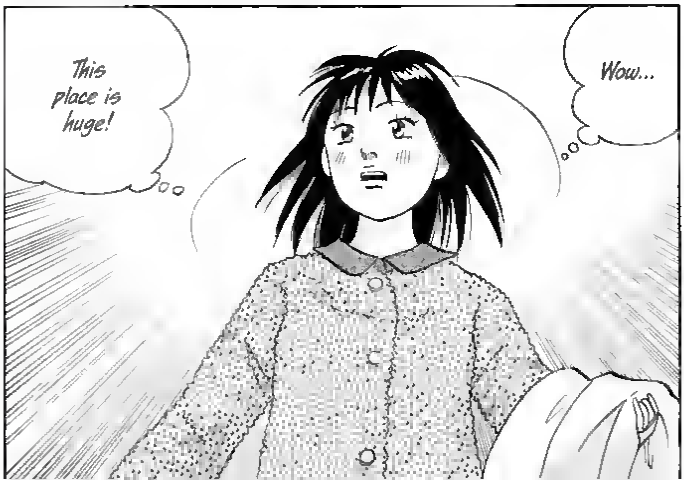

.....

To be honest, I'm not sure myself.
Is it a good or bad thing to let Takako meet with Ichinose Kai?
At this critical moment,

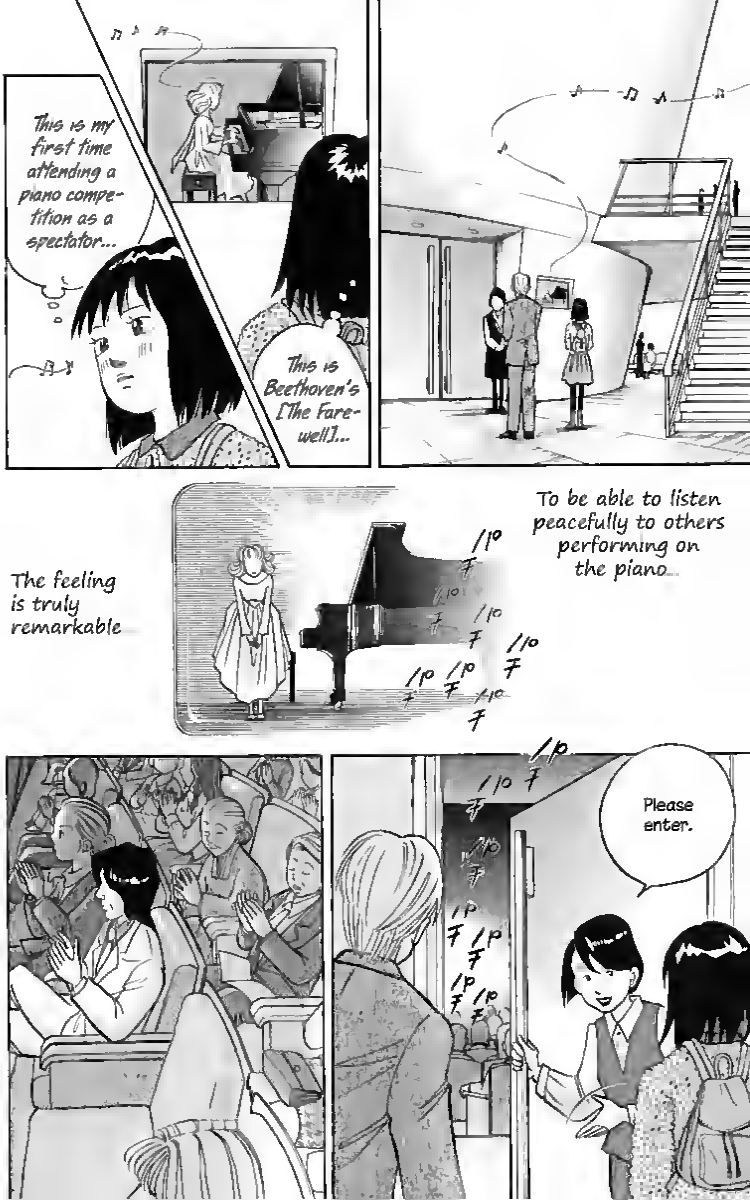
It makes me feel afraid
Whatever the out-come may be.
I couldn't make a decision even though I spent the whole night thinking about it.
Following my own instincts might turn out to be an idea
I decided to bring Takako with me...
Takako, we must hurry!

To meet up with Ichinose Kai!
Is admis-sion still available?
The competi-tion already started 10 minutes ago.

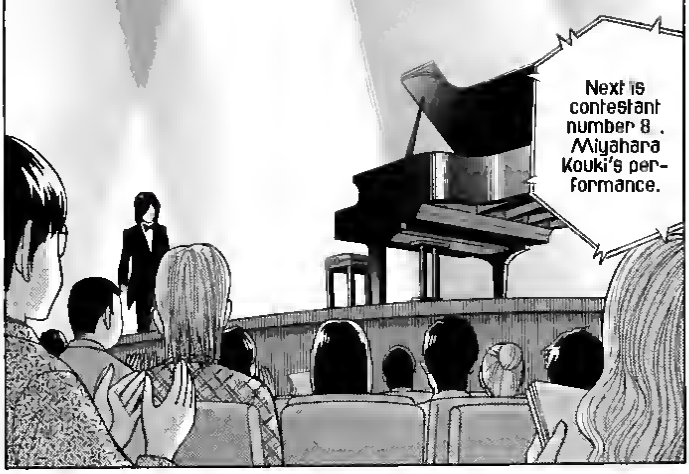
The first contestant is currently performing, please wait for the performance to end before entering the hall.
This is the brochure for the competition...

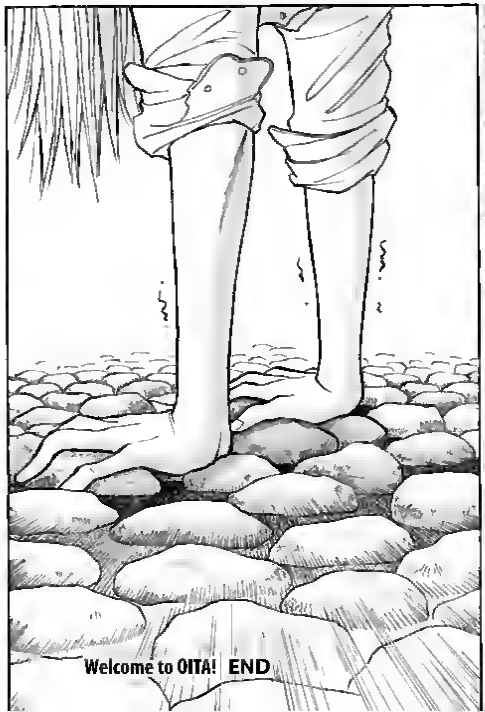

This place is huge!
Wow...

Order of Appearance
2 Nagasaka Yoko
8 Miyahara Kouki
26 Ichinose Kai
38 Kur Manato
Ryokuhei
Thank... Thank goodness!
Let me to show both of you to the hall.
26 Ichinose Kai
Ichinose Kai isn't the first contestant!
Takako!
We made it on time--!!


This is my first time attending a piano competition as a spectator...
This is Beethoven's [The Farewell]...
To be able to listen peacefully to others performing on the piano...
The feeling is truly remarkable
Please enter.

He is finally here...
Even the little princess has come along?


Next is contestant number 8 . Miyahara Kouki's performance.


Welcome to OITA! END

Onii-chan... Onii-chan...
Handsome Onii-chan ...
*ONII-CHAN: BIG BROTHER

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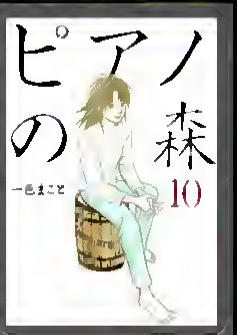

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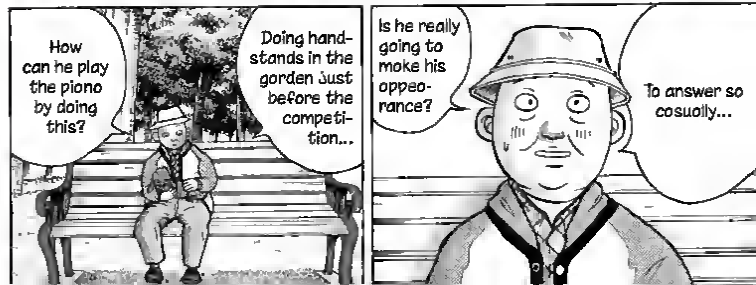
Chapter 90
Some-body I want you to meet
Oni-chan... Oni-chan...

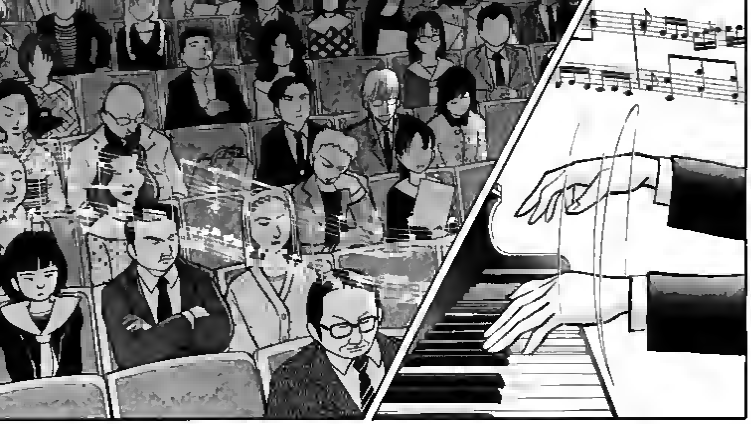
Hey, Oni-chan!
Enough with the handstand!
Your cellphone has been ringing for awhile!

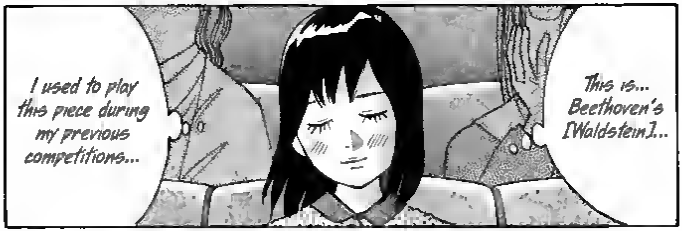
Isn't this your mobile phone?
EH?
Incoming call
Ajino
Thank you, ojichan-!
Is it already so late?
Ah! Not good!

You're participating in the piano competition, right?
Good luck, Oni-chan!

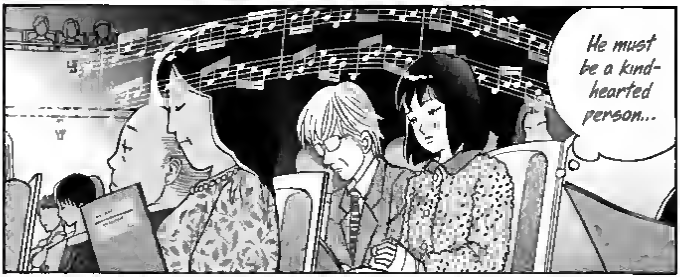
Yeah! Thanks!

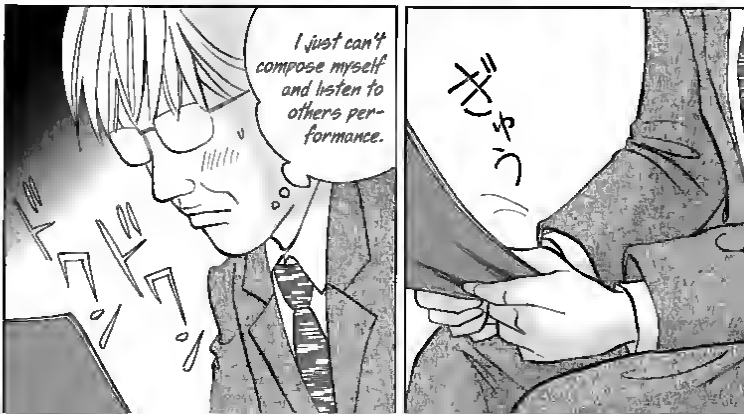

How can he play the piano by doing this?
Doing handstands in the garden just before the competition...
Is he really going to make his appearance?
To answer so casually...



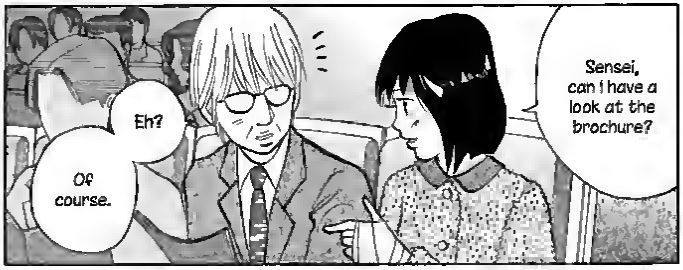

I used to play this piece during my previous competitions...
This is... Beethoven's [Waldstein]...

To enjoy someone else's performance with a calm heart,
It's indeed a brand new experience for me.



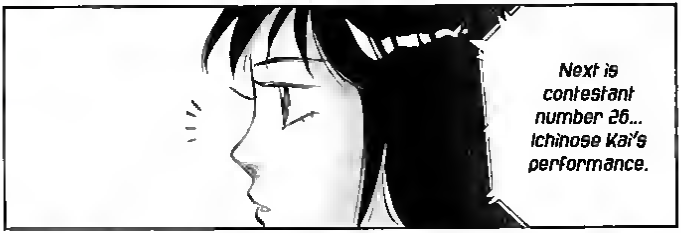

I just can't compose myself and listen to others performance.
ドドド

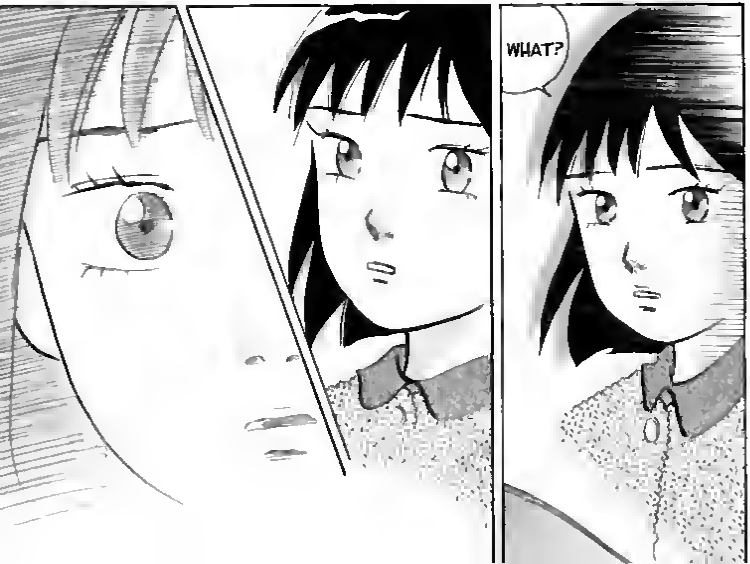
After several years of searching, Takako and I can finally see him again
Time really flies, he must be 16 years old already
Next one...
Next one...
After this, it's going to be Ichinose Kai's turn.
It's hard to believe that I got here by plane just to watch your performance.
Ichinose Kai...
I guess you won't be tossing your tie and shoe away this time?
All of this is due to a single person, Ajino Sousuke.


Sensei, can I have a look at the brochure?
Eh?
Of course.

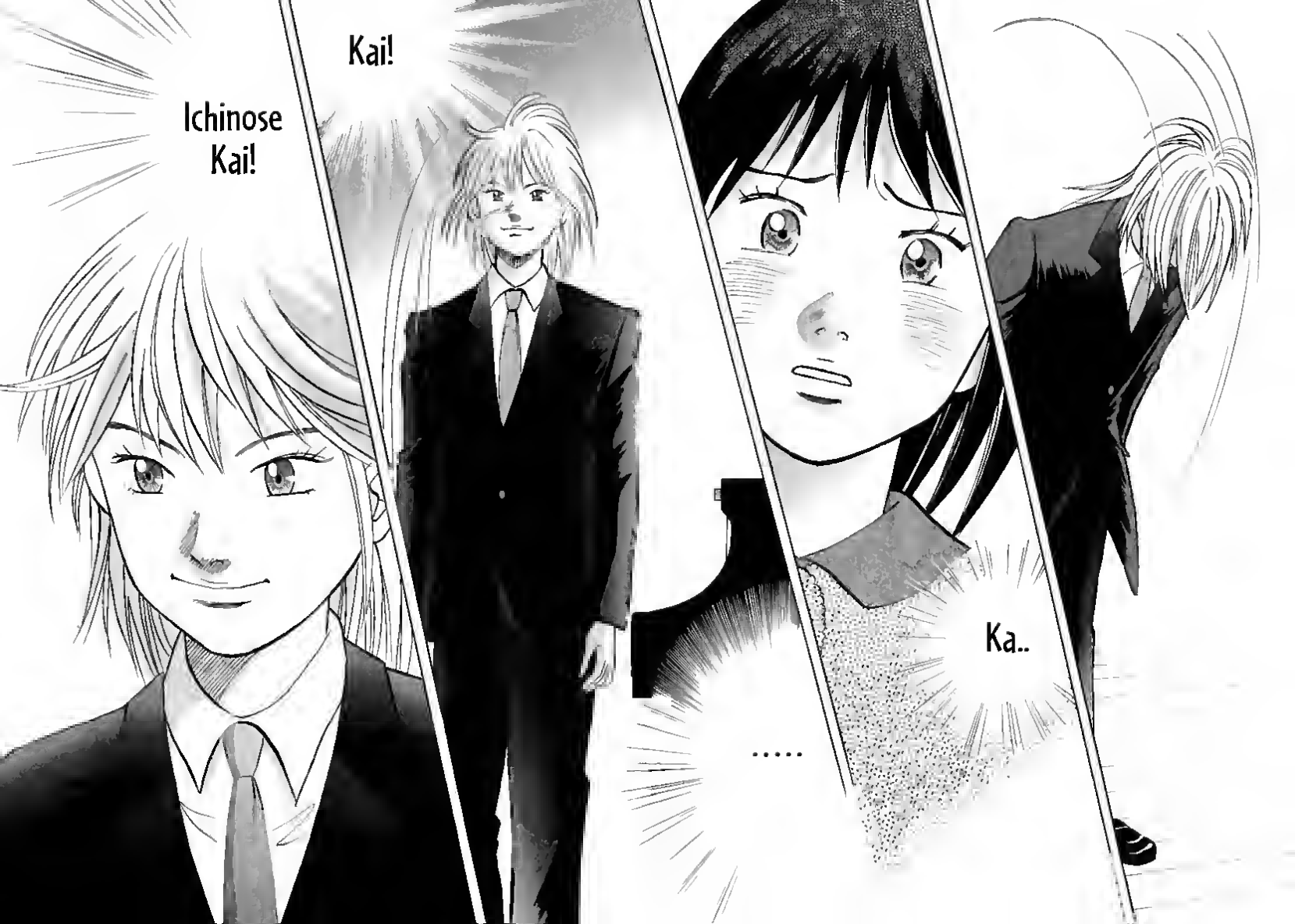
I just want to see the qualifiers of this competition...
The first person seems to be quite old, I'm not sure whether Beethoven's songs are part of the requirement.
The person you want me to meet is one of the contestants?
Yes, he's the next contestant.

?
At last...?
We have found him, at last.
Next contestant?
JAPAN


Next is contestant number 26... Ichinose Kai's performance.


WHAT?

Ah!
パチパチパチパチパチパチパチパチ
パチパチパチパチパチパチパチパチ
パチパチパチパチパチパチパチパチ


Ichinose Kai!
Kai!
Ka..
.....

I... I can't believe it...
It's impossible...

He-heh...
YES!
Sen... Sensei..!
Ichinose Kai, you've finally appeared!
Phew...
I would like to see how talented you are with my own eyes!

I was almost scared to death.
He was almost late,

I had been...
Kai!

Waiting for this day to come!
Kai, concentrate.
And...

Somebody I Want You to Meet/END

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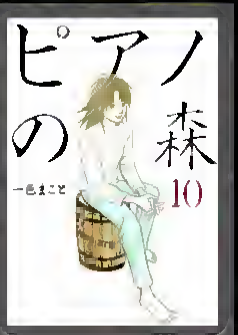

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Chapter 91 Piano sonata

Are you stupid?
Come on... concentrate!
Crap...
My habits from my time as Maria... I instinctively acted as if I had a ridiculously long sleeve.
Let us see with our own eyes...
How much have you improved?!
Kai...

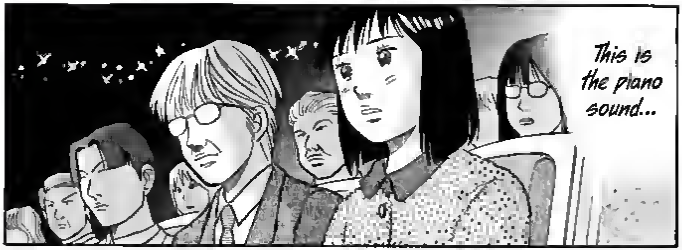
Kai...
すっ
すう

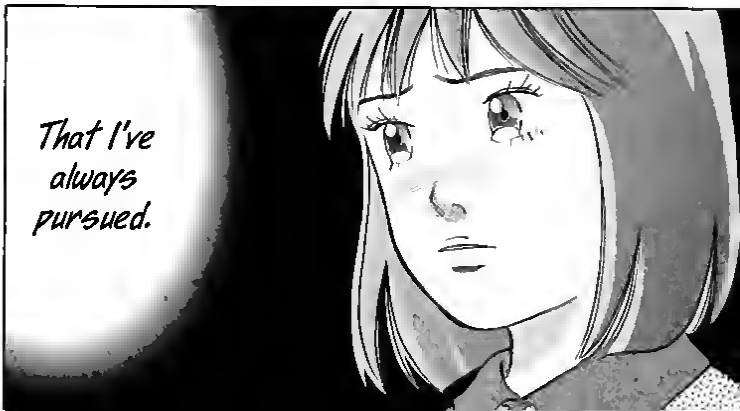
ふわっ

what's this immediate change of pose for?
Hey hey hey...

Ah..

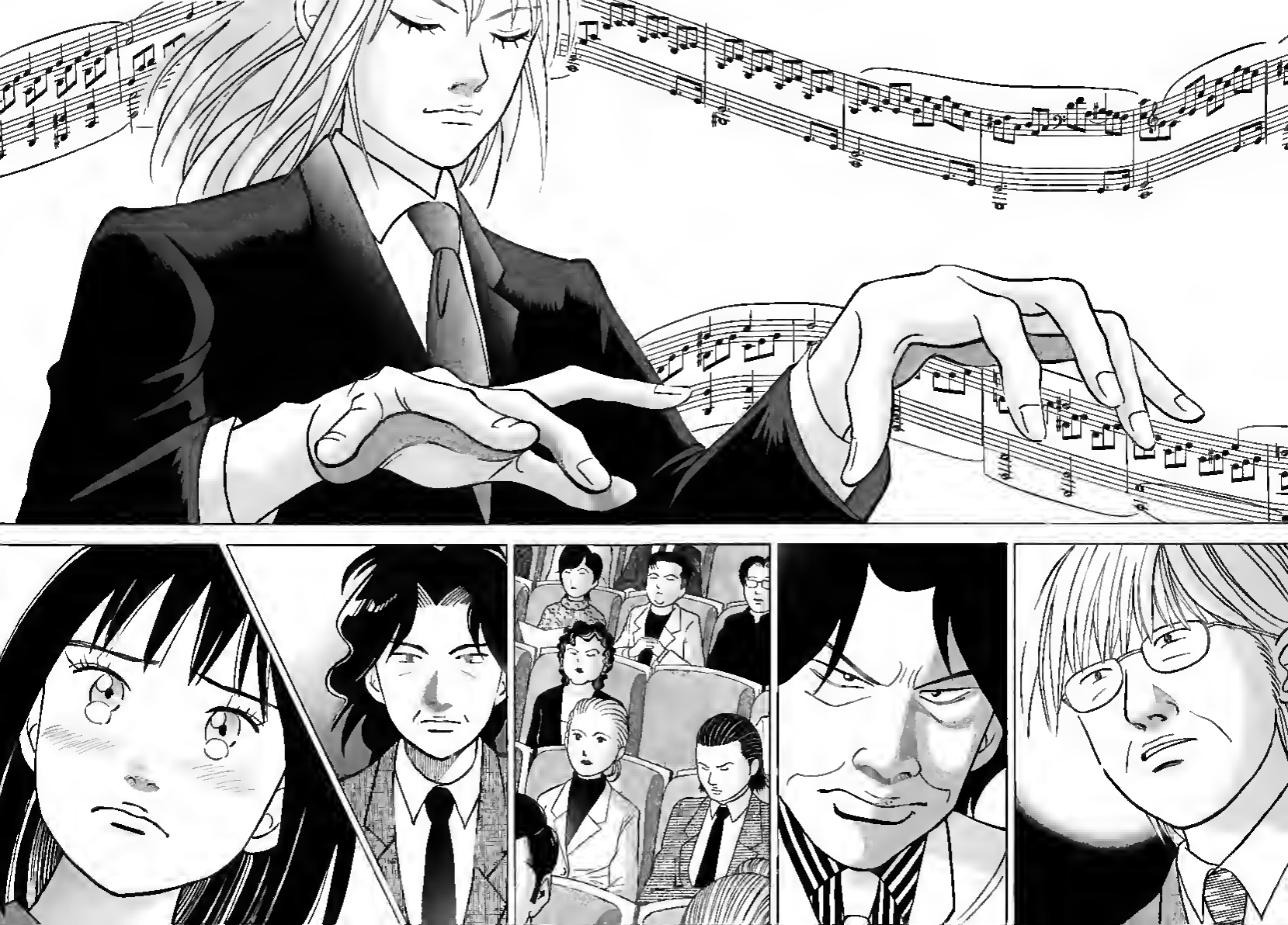
This is...

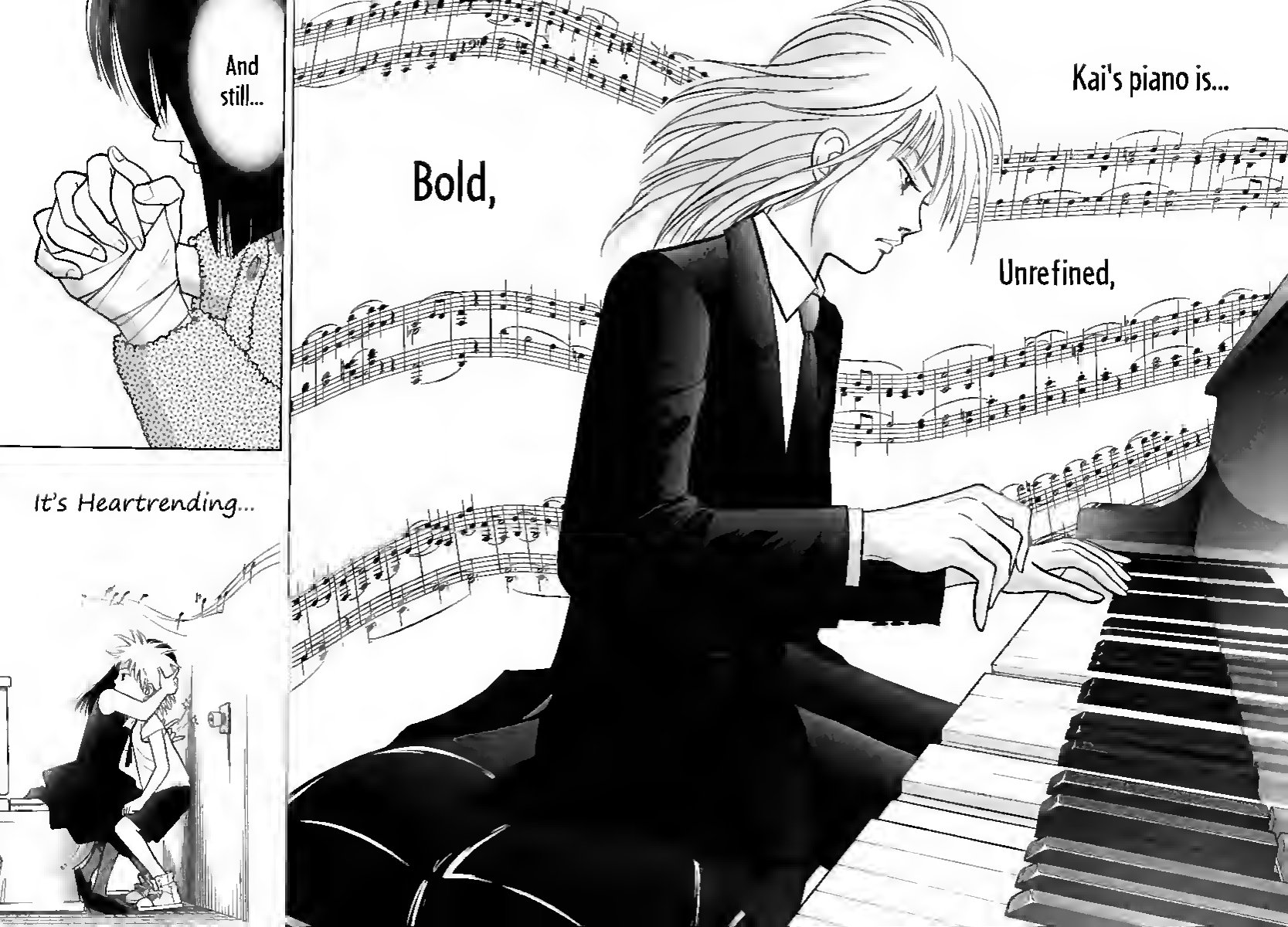

This is the piano sound...


That I've always pursued.

No, this is much more than that...
Beethoven's Piano Sonata #14
His song choice is...
C-sharp minor Op.27 No.2

— Moonlight sonata —




And still...
It's Heartrending...
Kai's piano is...
Bold,
Unrefined,

It...
completely
Kai
envelops me!

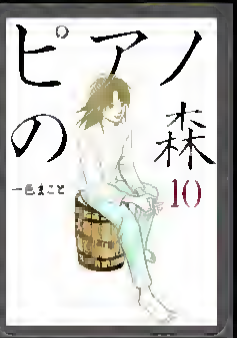
Just how can you play the "moonlight sonata" like this?!
How...
Why...
Why do I accept his feelings so easily?
How on earth could you grow up like this!? Ichinose
Shiiit
It is so...
Yet...
This piano is far from perfection...

...Lovely

Chapter Piano Sonata /END

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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Chapter 92

Audience

After entering the third movement...
My left hand...
My hand...
It keeps resounding in my heart...
Kai's piano became more and more sensual...

And play the piano on stage!!
Then I can be like you...
I want to cure it!

Really want to play the piano...
Right now, I...
Why...
I really don't understand...

What do you think?
This unpolished gem-stone...
Is definitely a new source of excite-ment for us top-notch pianists.
But I've never heard this kind of "Moonlight sonata".
I've lived for a long time....
Haha...
Just listening to him makes my heart beat like crazy!

The "Japan Soliste Contest" is just a show.
It is nothing but a warm-up performance for the oncoming Music Fest.
You want to make him a star?
It's just that there weren't any decent contestants before.
Hahaha that sounds a bit too mean.
That's really a first.
But for a famous orchestra to take an interest in some obscure 16-year-old boy...

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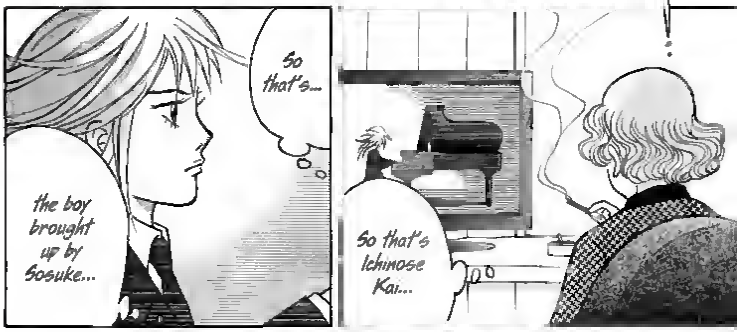
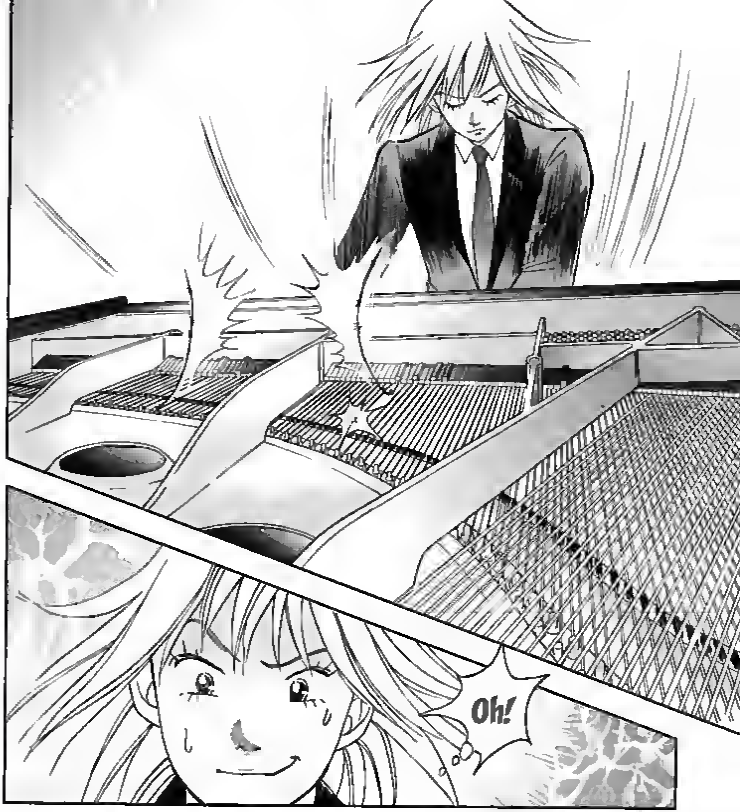

So that's...
the boy brought up by Sosuke...
So that's Ichinose Kai...

ニッコリ

This is really interesting.
I see...
Hmm...
So that's Sosuke's student...


Oh!

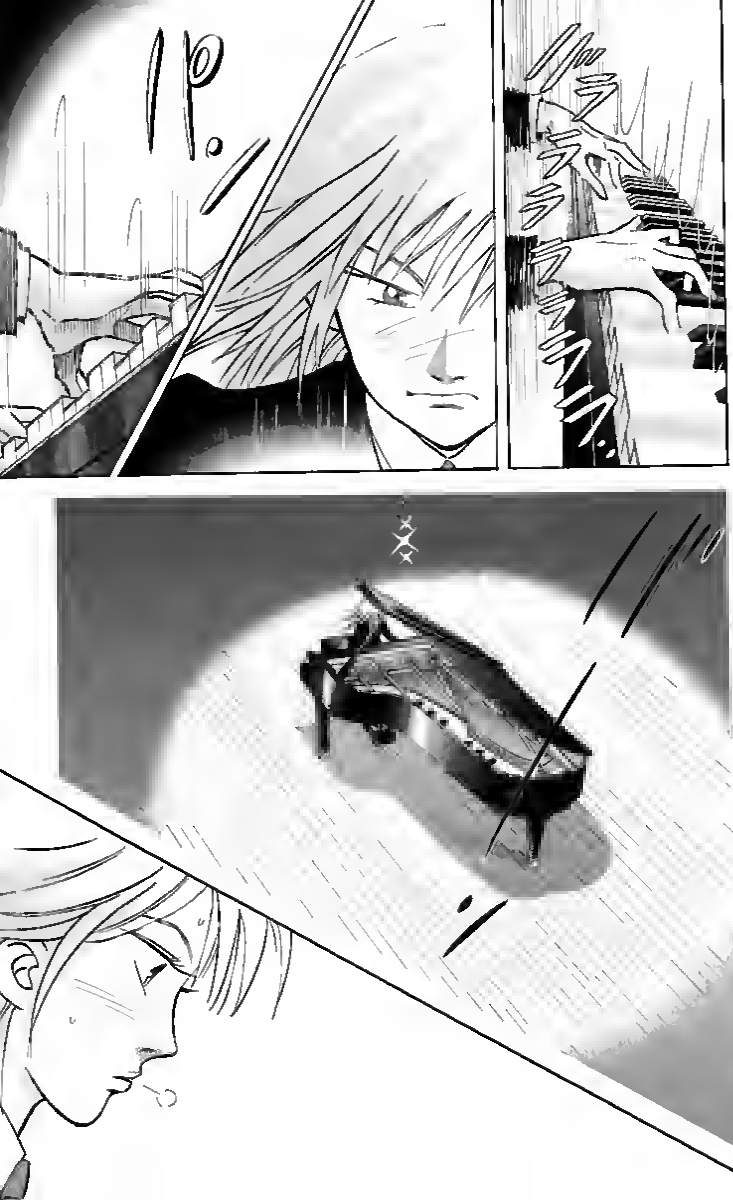
It broke.
The piano chord...

Oh whatever!
This is bad...
He's impro-vising!!
...Ah...

Not just that...
He's improvising in a way such that you can't notice his blunder!
Haha-haha...
So interesting.
Sosuke's student...

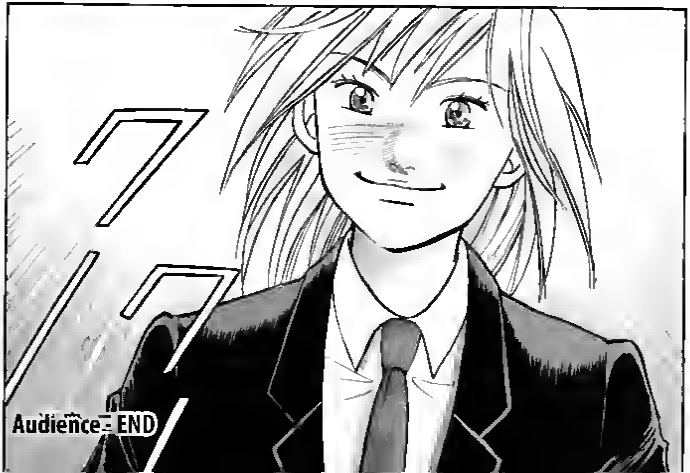
Is challenging Beethoven's authority.
Kai's fingers become unconsciously forceful whenever he plays lively songs.
If the piano happens to be in bad shape, it won't be surprising if he breaks more than one chord.
I've reminded him before...

That's why I wanted him to relax before the competition...
He's amazing!
Impressive...


ピ。
ラララララ……

ワアアア

パチパチパチ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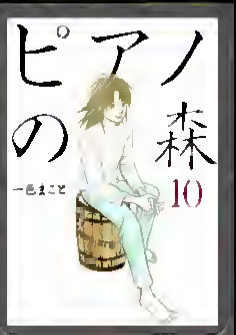
Audience - END

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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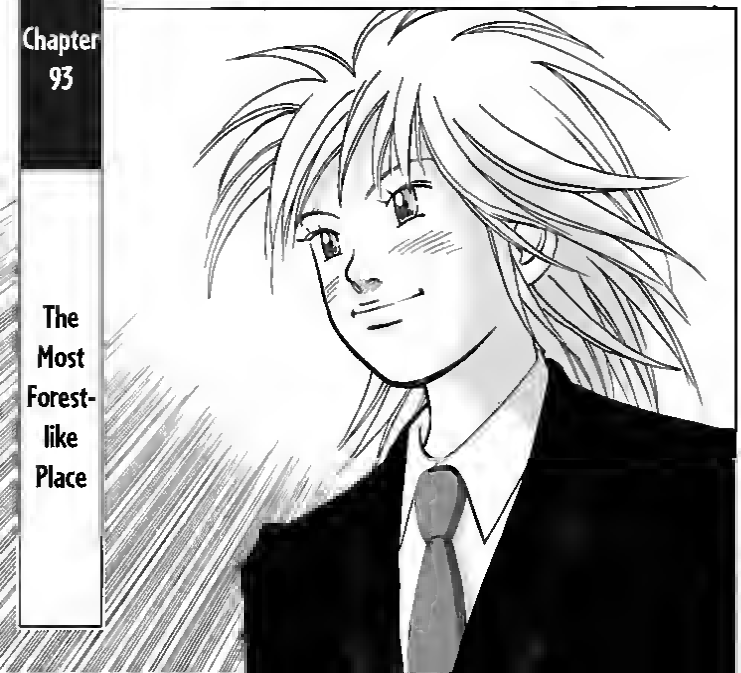
Chapter 93

The Most Forest-like Place

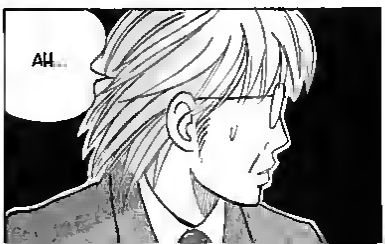


アアア
ワーワー
ブラボー
Kai!
Unbelievable!
Such incredible skill!

Kai!
Kai!!
Kai!!

Next, we have No. 38...

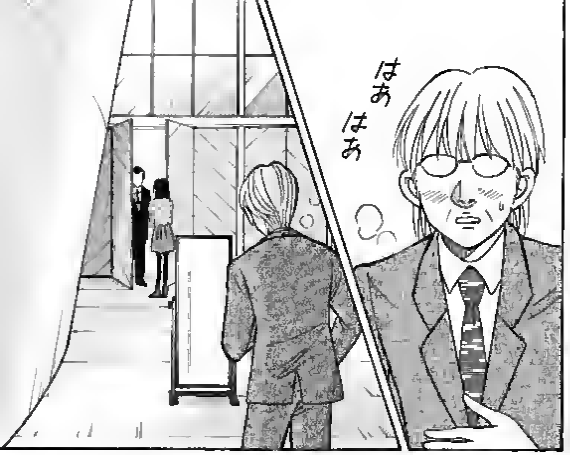
Takako!


AH...

Takako!
Kai's gone!
If I miss this chance...
No. I must find him!
Kai!!
I might never see him again!

Oh! Maybe he went back to the auditorium to listen to others performances...
Thank you. I'll keep looking for him.
Then he's probably in the lobby or the staff lounge... Though it seems that he's not there either...
I'm not sure where he went... But, if he's not at the contestants resting area...
Sorry for bothering you.
The gentleman who just finished performing? He left already.
Kai... Where are you!?
I want to see you once more...

There's so much I want to tell you!
Where on earth did he go?
Sigh...
Takako!



Staff Lounge

No entry for non-staff

Ichinose Kai?
You mean the performer just now...
He should be in the contestants resting area...
Thank you.
I'll keep looking.
Are you looking for Kai, Miss?
If he's not here,
Then he's most probably in the park over there.
Ajino Sousuke!

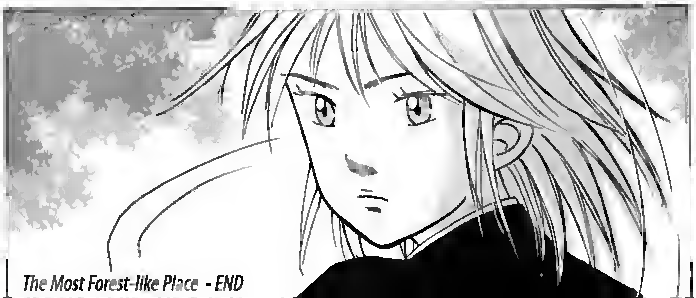
Thank you. I'll go and find him right away.
Ah..
The park...?
There's a big public park in front of this building.
Mm-hmm.
Thank you!
Yes.
That should make it easier to find him.
Kai is probably in the most forest-like place.
Oh right!

?
The park...
Is there really a park in front of the building?
The park
The park.

Oh!
There is!

There are trees everywhere...
But this park is so big...

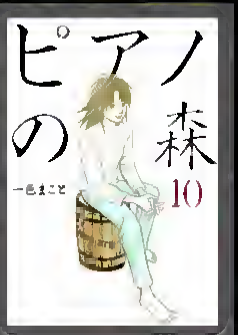
Everywhere is forest-like...
The most forest-like place...
Where on earth is Kai?
Where should I start...
Eh?!
Please, no! I'm exhausted! Let's go home!
Eh?
Let's go and have a look!
Look! That place looks like a forest!



The Most Forest-like Place - END

PIANO NO MORI

by Isshiki Makoto



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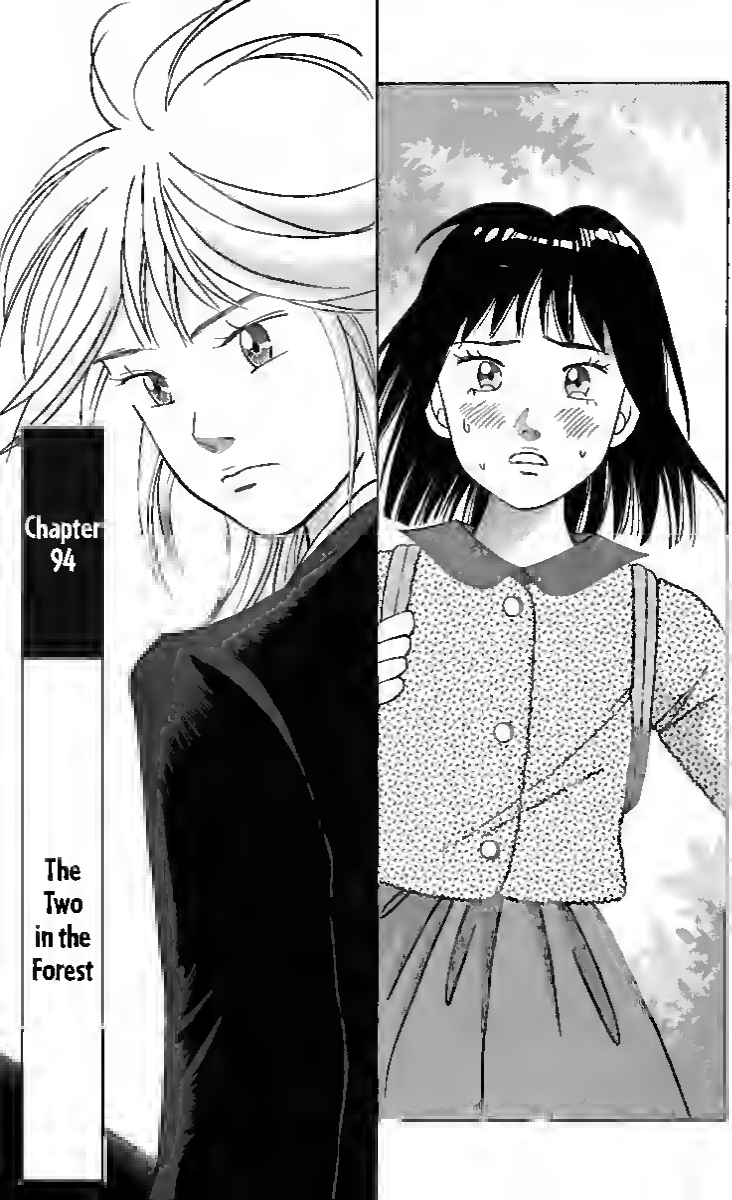
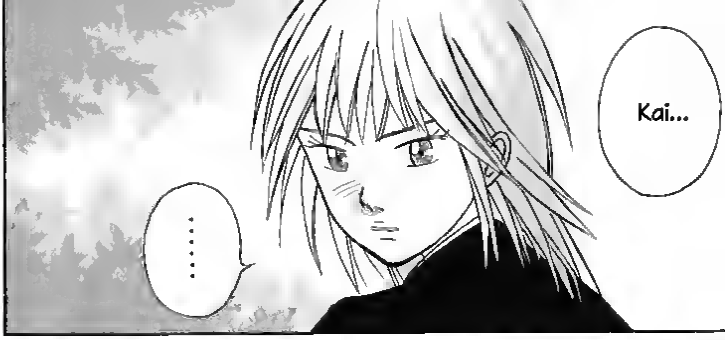
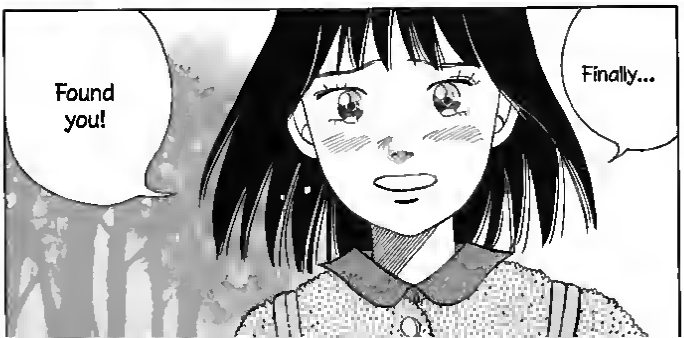


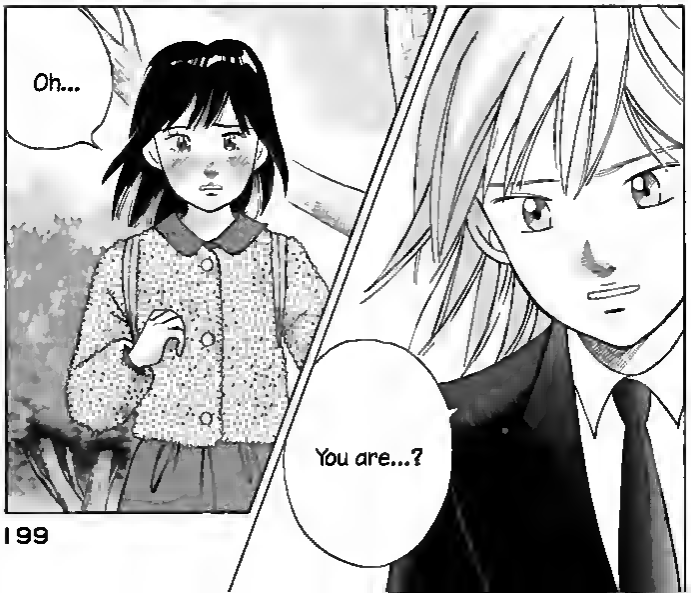
Chapter 94

The Two in the Forest

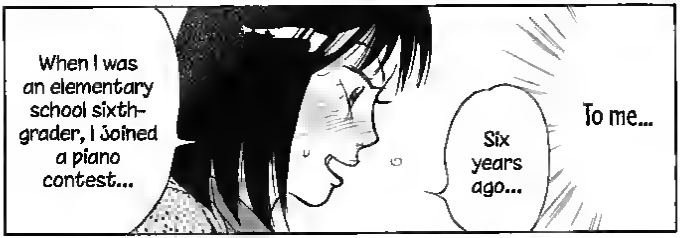

Kai...
.....

I...


Finally...
Found you!

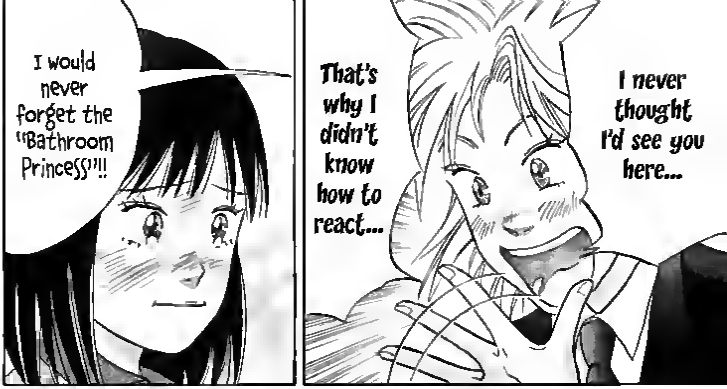

Oh...
You are...?

I am...
Erm... Maruyama Takako.
Oh right...

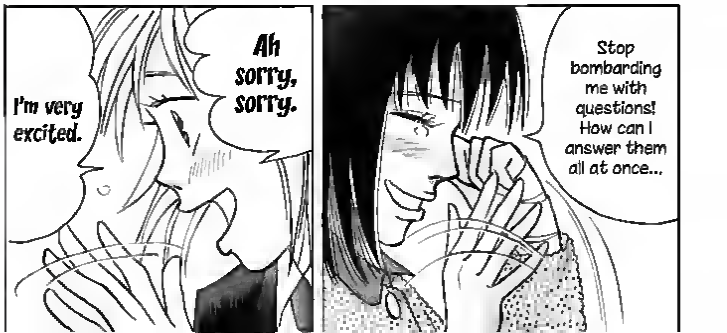

To me...
Six years ago...
When I was an elementary school sixth-grader, I joined a piano contest...

You were only a fifth-grader then.
That was an unforgettable experience...
Perhaps, to Kai, it meant nothing at all.

I don't remember you?
You... You might not remember me... but...
Takaka...
Maru-yama...
You're the "Bathroom Princess"!!
Stop kidding! How could I not remember you!!


I would never forget the "Bathroom Princess"!!!
That's why I didn't know how to react...
I never thought I'd see you here...

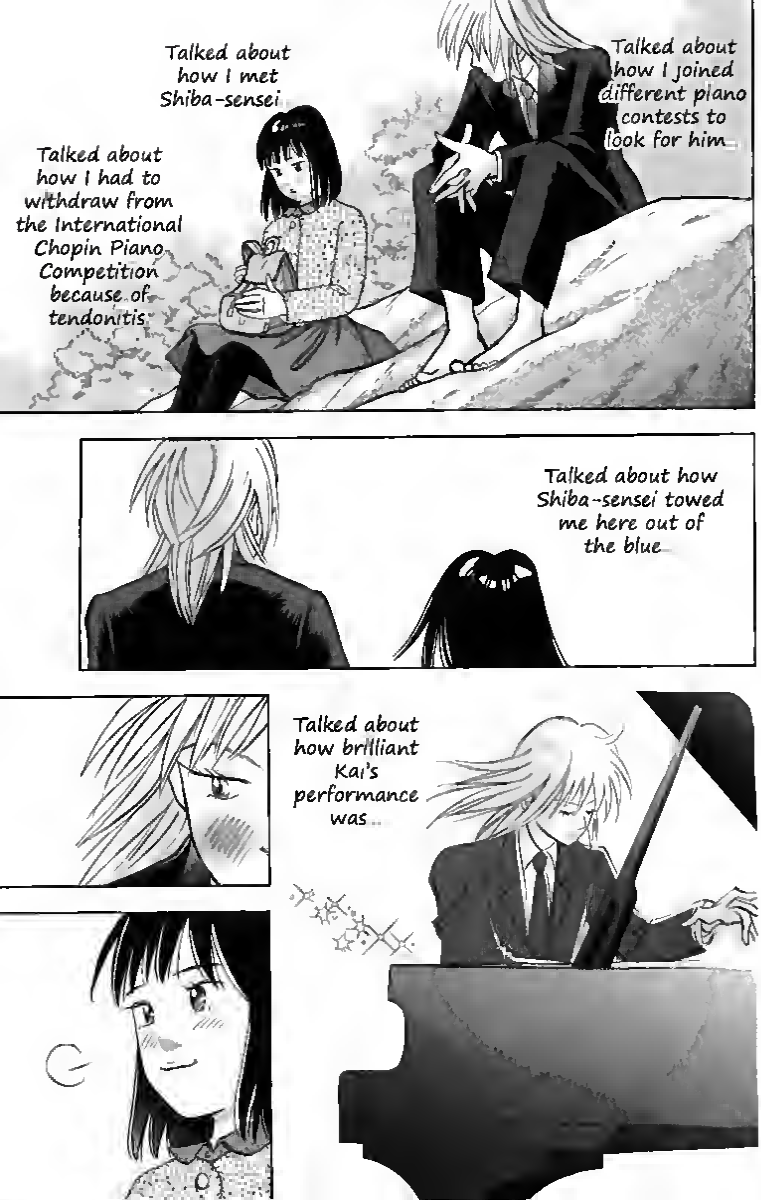
what have you been up to all these years!?
what a big surprise!!
you listened to my performance!?
you must be kidding, Takako!!
what are you doing here!?
what about the piano? You're still playing, right!?


I'm very excited.
Ah sorry, sorry.
Stop bombarding me with questions! How can I answer them all at once...

I've been looking for you all along...
Kai...
Your hand...
Did something happen?
Are you alright, Takako?
Yeah...
Is it hurt?

I talked about the "Special Award" that I won... Talked about my scepticism towards the judging criteria...

I started from the competition I lost six years ago...

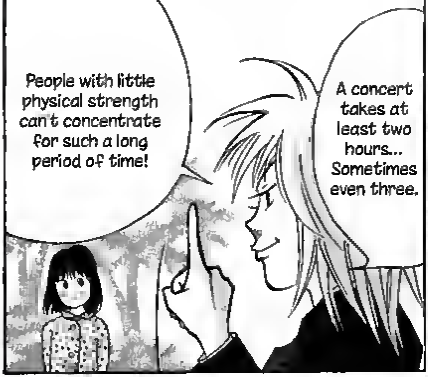

Talked about how I met Shiba-sensei
Talked about how I joined different piano contests to look for him
Talked about how I had to withdraw from the International Chopin Piano Competition because of tendonitis
Talked about how Shiba-sensei towed me here out of the blue
Talked about how brilliant Kai's performance was

I told Kai every-thing
That's what you get for ignoring the voice of the piano.
I see~
The more your left hand hurts, the more the piano has to say.
You get tendonitis because the piano wants to tell you something.
Huh?

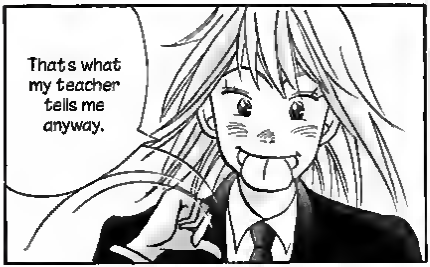
Aaaaaaw~ Takako! Stop it! Don't play me this way!
Takako, you meanie~
Why do you have to be so rough!!?? Sob~ sob~
For example... something like this!
Uh-
Hum!
?
I...
I don't play the piano roughly at all.
Aha-haha!!
What are you laughing about...
You and the piano are one and the same.
The pain your body feels is a warning signal from the piano.

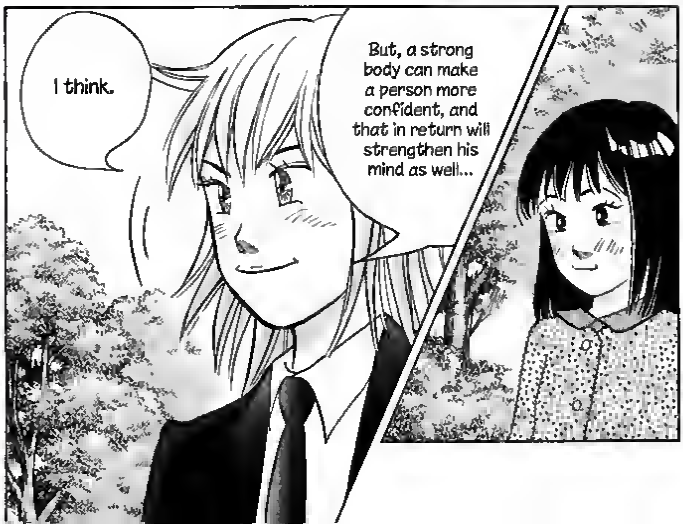
Kai's words... poured into my heart slowly in a warm current...
Is it because of the forest?
Being in the serene and tranquil forest makes it seem that time has stopped.

Start training your body!
Takako!
The conclusion is!
What?
Yo!
Ha!
Heh!


People with little physical strength can't concentrate for such a long period of time!
A concert takes at least two hours... Sometimes even three.

You can only become a great pianist by training your body and mind!


That's what my teacher tells me anyway.


I think.
But, a strong body can make a person more confident, and that in return will strengthen his mind as well...

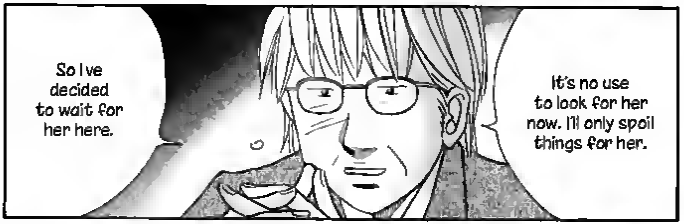
And since we already have the talent for playing the piano, all we need now is the physical strength! ...That's what I think...
I don't know about that...
But your performance was great. You'll definitely come first this time!
Really?
Of course!
Well... Today is the first time I joined any contest in six years...
And I even committed the unforgivable taboo of improvising.
But that was because the piano chord broke. It's not your fault...

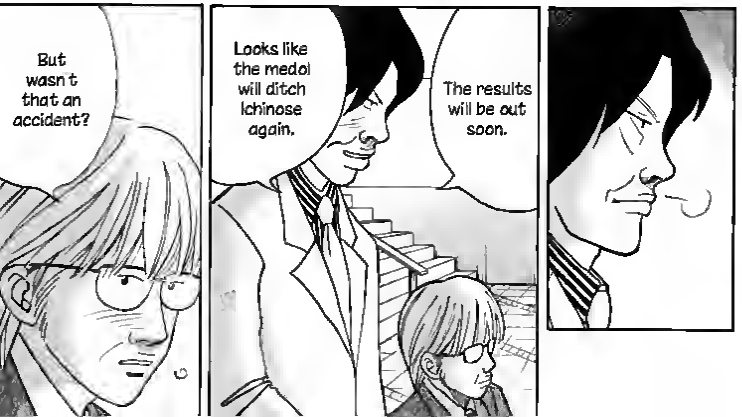
And your improvisation skill was amazing. Even I couldn't really tell where the missing notes were.
Haha...
Thanks for the encouragement!
But a contest is a contest. Takako probably knows this better than I do.
Yeah...

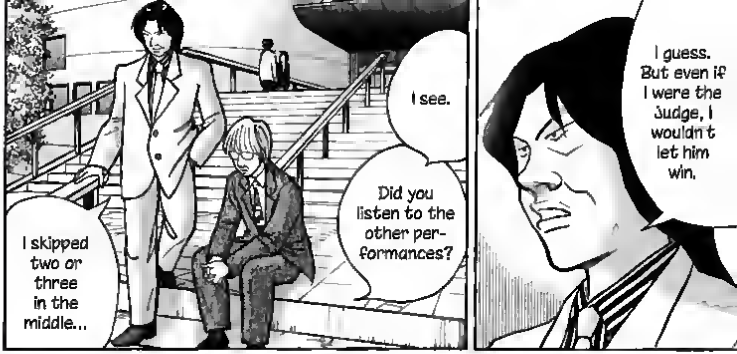
Sigh~~

Maybe I...
I'm just not destined to ever get a medal...

It's already been two hours.
Is it okay? Shouldn't you be looking for your little princess in the park?
Sigh...


So I've decided to wait for her here.
It's no use to look for her now. I'll only spoil things for her.


But wasn't that an accident?
Looks like the medoi will ditch Ichinose again.
The results will be out soon.


I skipped two or three in the middle...
Did you listen to the other performances?
I see.
I guess. But even if I were the judge, I wouldn't let him win.

I want to listen to it again.
But Ichinose's piano was still the best.